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THE HISTORY OF  
THE ENGLISH NOVEL



# THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL

By Ernest A. Baker, D. Lit., M.A.

- |           |  |
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# THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL

By Ernest A. Baker, D. Lit., M.A.

Volume VII

The Age of Dickens and Thackeray

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## PREFACE

THE contents of this volume, as of those preceding it, were determined by chronological considerations, but there are inevitably some loose ends. Of the novelists rightly included, several survived both Thackeray and Dickens, who themselves outlived and out-wrote the first half of the nineteenth century in which the majority flourished. Then some, the Bronte sisters for instance, began and ended well within the period spanned by those two. Yet there are such obvious reasons for putting these into a subsequent chapter of literary history that on one is likely to complain at not finding them here.

Librarians do not expect to be thanked for the services they render. I feel obliged, nevertheless, to express by obligations, not only to the British Museum and the National Central Library, but also to the public libraries and the chief librarians and their staffs at Greenwich, Woolwich, Croydon, St. Marylebone, and other boroughs, and the libraries of University College and the University of London, for a liberal supply of material, much of it scarce. And, lastly, I am deeply grateful to Dr. Edith C. Batho, of University College, for casting a watchful eye over the proof-sheets.

E. A. B.



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THE AGE OF DICKENS  
AND THACKERAY





## CHAPTER I

### THE IRISH NOVELISTS

THE Waverley novels were the most important event in the *The* history of fiction between Fielding's time and that of Dickens *influence* and Thackeray. It was in no small degree owing to Scott's *of Scott* performances and the interest they compelled that the novel became for recent days the most popular of literary forms and the readiest avenue for the aspirant to Parnassus.<sup>1</sup> No hand, not even Balzac's, who was one of those who felt Scott's influence, ever gave a stronger impulsion to the art of fiction, little as he was himself an artist in the more rigorous meaning of the word. Hasty and negligent in workmanship, he had the native strength and the boldness of vision to infuse a new energy into the novel. He gave it wider and longer perspectives, a fuller sense of the infinite variety of mankind. The romantic novel which he invented, that mixture of sentiment and common sense, fact and imagination, of comic and tragic and simply human, was to have a countless and still more diversified progeny. He put life into historical fiction, which had hitherto been crude make-believe or academic exercises. The Scottish novel, which was to flourish in a plot of its own during the nineteenth century, owed as much to him as to Galt and Miss Ferrier, whose work, as already noted, first reached publication on the wings of Scott's popularity.<sup>2</sup> The schools of historical novelists in England, America, France, and elsewhere were obviously composed of Scott's disciples. It is not less true to say that the Irish novelists who came after Miss Edgeworth and Lady Morgan were likewise part of

<sup>1</sup> Masson took pains to establish this fact (*British Novelists and their Styles*, 1859, pp. 212-213: "Statistics of Novel-writing"). The accessions to the British Museum Library rose from 26 a year in 1820—that is, from the time the Waverley novels were at the height of their popularity—to 101 a year in 1830.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume VI. 227.

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his following. Scott had amiably protested that it was the example of Miss Edgeworth's Irish stories which encouraged him to attempt a similar service for his own country. The Banims, Griffin, Carleton, Lover, and Lever, however, did not follow her lead, but sought to achieve such a delineation of national and local character, manners, and customs as Scott had done for his own country; and to draw similar romantic effects from the strife of Irish and English, Catholic and Protestant, the peasantry goaded to lawlessness and the propertied classes relentlessly trampling them down, as he had found in the struggles of Highlanders and Lowlanders, Royalists and Covenanters, Jacobites and Hanoverians. They were enormously more indebted to Scott than to Miss Edgeworth, who was of a different school of fiction, and who held aloof from the racial antagonisms which actually underlay some of the moral and social problems treated in her Irish novels more than she was aware, or at any rate more than she ever admitted.

When Scott wrote, the feuds and civil disturbances which formed much of the historical groundwork of his drama were a thing of the past. Not so in Ireland. The rebellion of 1798 was still recent, it still rankled; a similar explosion might have occurred at any moment down to the re-establishment of British security in 1815. For long after that, old discontents and animosities continued to smoulder, ready to burst into flame. The causes of disaffection were not to be extirpated for nearly a century, and the ever-present sense of wrong kept alive the memory of former atrocities on both sides. As in Russia under the Tsars, the novel became a recognized weapon of political agitation, a more insidious and more potent weapon than it would have been under a more tolerant regime. Politics and social, economic, and religious questions could not be kept out of even the least controversial fiction. The best of those who honestly proposed to offer a faithful and unbiased picture of the life they knew were men of strong views; even had they tried to, they could not help being polemical. The only revolution contemplated by Maria Edgeworth was that of the inner man. The novels written

by members of an oppressed race were the most powerful arguments for a political revolution that have ever been submitted by Irish patriots. Those of Miss Edgeworth's younger contemporary, Lady Morgan, do not rank high as literature; apart from their perfervid patriotism they made but a mere-tricious appeal to the crudest sentimentality. But she was in the thick of the conflict, and saw so much of what was going on that her lively accounts have a definite historical value, even if they had little more practical effect at the time than to keep the English reader alive to the fact that there was an Irish question.

The first half of the nineteenth century was the heyday *The novel* of the novel. Fiction was not only a branch of literature *of* but in still greater measure a business commodity, a way of *commerce* earning one's living, with high prizes for the successful, who might or might not be the best endowed or the most accomplished. With every allowance for changes in the value of money, this was probably the era when authors received the highest prices, especially for novels. Scott, ousted from the trade in poetic romance by Byron, discovered a no less profitable line, and made an enormous sum out of the Waverley novels. Novelists who had once secured the public ear went on pouring out book after book; the total output was enormous. Soon it was exactly the same on the Continent and in America. Owing to this commercialization of the novel and too much dependence on a public of mediocre taste, many writers went astray, and ruined, or at least marred, what might have been excellent work. Carleton, for instance, wrote poor novels, when his genius was for the brief dramatic story. Hence the loose construction and uncertainty of aim, the bane of most English fiction then, and the vapid sentiment and inflated rhetoric. This last in the case of the Irish novels was a direct result of the popularity which marked out the novel as the readiest medium for propaganda, though argument and rhetoric were incomparably less effective than the direct statement of intolerable facts. Sydney, Lady Morgan *Lady* (1775-1859), whose first novel appeared three years after *Morgan* *Castle Rackrent*, was as far the opposite of her staid and

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responsible senior as could well be. Her father, a talented but improvident actor, ran a theatre in Dublin with ups and downs of success, but gave up the struggle in 1798, when Sydney had to prepare to earn her own living. He had introduced her to some of his noble patrons, and she seems as a mere girl to have shone by her good looks, liveliness, and versatile gifts. At one time she was a governess; but she pined to be an author, and came out with a volume of *Poems* in 1801,<sup>1</sup> following it up with what was likely to pay better, a couple of novels. But it was evidently by her genius for society that she made her way. Sydney Owenson was not the vulgar adventuress that the censorious and the politically inimical dubbed her. Self-reliant, unconventional, and fearlessly outspoken, she resembled the favourite characters in her books. She took upon herself the burden of her father's debts, and a satisfactory reply to her detractors is that she eventually paid these off. The governess who figures in *O'Donnel* as a widowed duchess is her dignified self-portrait; but, after the sensation raised by her first successful novel, she was inevitably nicknamed "the Wild Irish Girl." One of the best-known women of her time, she dazzled higher and still higher circles by her wit, her harp, and her songs, rousing friends and foes with her furious patriotism. In 1812 she met Thomas Charles Morgan, a writer on medical and semi-philosophical subjects. He was considerably her junior, but fell violently in love. She told the Lord-Lieutenant that she would not be plain Mrs Morgan. Her admirer was at once knighted. Their marriage gave her a sure position in Dublin, where her drawing-room became the rallying-point of the learned and the frivolous, and of journalists and politicians of all shades. Even after 1839, when she quitted Ireland for London, she maintained the vivacity, the social blandishments, and the incessant warfare of her palmy days against

<sup>1</sup> Lowndes, in *The Bibliographer's Manual*, gives 1797 as the date, and adds the note, "Published in her 14th year." The date 1783, doubtfully accepted for her birth in the *D.N.B.* and elsewhere, is apparently arrived at by simple subtraction. Brown (*Ireland in Fiction*, 183) gives 1777. But Lady Morgan's early history is obscure, and it seems safest to adopt the year regarded as most probable by her biographer, W. J. Fitzpatrick (*Lady Morgan, her career literary and personal*, 1860, p. 11).

a host of critics and irreconcilables, and was a character in society down to her death. Among her miscellaneous writings were two very profitable books on France and Italy. She was granted £300 a year from the Civil List, under the Grey administration.

Her first two novels, *St Clair, or the Heiress of Desmond* ("The (1803), and *The Novice of St Dominick* (1805), were flimsy sentimental romances strongly tinged with nationalist feeling. In literary quality, *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) was not greatly superior. But it came out at a timely moment, flattering the prejudices of some and exciting curiosity in others. No story in letters was ever put together more clumsily. These glowing epistles are packed with dates and other historical information, including rectified etymologies, and are encumbered with footnotes, for Lady Morgan was always a bit of a blue-stocking. The estranged son of an English earl wandering in Ireland finds himself near the ruinous castle of Inishmore, ancient seat of the princes of that name, who were bloodily defeated and thrust out of their possessions by his own ancestors. The prince to-day is an aged man, poor as a peasant, but too proud to associate with an English nobleman. Glorvina, his daughter, last of her race, far from being an ignorant barbarian, has all the natural graces and the education and high accomplishments of a princess. The incognito falls in love, and Glorvina responds. But she is under some obscure obligation to an unknown benefactor. The lover runs off distracted. Then he hears that Glorvina is to be married. He returns in time to find that the would-be bridegroom is his own father, who like the son has had to suppress his identity in order to win the old prince's consent. Needless to say, the two change places. The sentiment, the gush, the tears—of joy, grief, or simple ecstasy—are worthy of such a fairy-tale.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The book went into seven editions within two years (Lowndes). But, though so much talked of then and long after, it has disappeared from the library shelves even in its own country. The only copy that all Ireland could produce recently was a tattered and dismembered relic from a prehistoric circulating library. Maturin's *Wild Irish Boy* (1808) and also *The Milesian Chief* (1812) were prompted by this work. The former has some pages showing a knowledge of Ireland, but is ruined by complications that led Maturin into the fashionable society of which his knowledge was

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"O'Don- O'Donnel, a *National Tale* (1814), is the same story a little  
nel" better told. Scott was pleased with it.<sup>1</sup> She had wished, says the preface, to use Irish history for "purposes of conciliation"; but discovered that to lift the veil was to renew the memory of events that had better be left in oblivion. So she uncovers the evils that are the existing result of bygone wrongs. O'Donnel is the representative of the old princes of Tyrconnel, reduced to poverty by forfeitures long ago and the follies of his later ancestors. As a Catholic, he has had to be educated secretly by a devoted old priest; and has won distinction in the Austrian service and the Irish Brigade, the British army being forbidden to such as he. A company of English fashionables come across this reserved but courtly gentleman, and out of impertinent curiosity thrust themselves on his notice. A fabulously wealthy Countess of Llanberis tries to take him up; but he nurses an affection for the Duchess of Belmont, the quondam governess. As he is too proud to risk the imputation of fortune-hunting, she has to take the initiative; and after their union he is restored to as much of the ancient honours as penal laws have left. The sentimentalism is blatant; and, although Lady Morgan makes something of "the amusing spectacle of seeing bon-ton frivolity exhibited in all its idleness and vacuity,"<sup>2</sup> her satire of snobbishness is that of an arrant snob. She is irritated most by the opulent idlers who come to Ireland to laugh at the oddities of the peasants, and sneer at the vestiges of ancient grandeur. Irish scenery as well as the splendours of former ages is extolled; like many others by the patriotic, the work is a cross between novel and guide-book, and overburdened with descriptive pages. The Irish consist of poverty-stricken natives and a dispossessed nobility, with a scanty middle class composed chiefly of griping attorneys and other satellites of the usurping lords of the soil. Her droll types, blarneying peasants and sheer buffoons, helped with Lover's and Lever's to establish the stage Irishman, half

nil. The other, wildly romantic, has as central figure the impoverished modern representative of an illustrious house. See also Volume V. 219-225.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, viii. 292.

<sup>2</sup> ii. 271.

fool, half mountebank, a myth not utterly destroyed till a century later.<sup>1</sup> Maria Edgeworth had avoided this pitfall; if she did not see very far into the racial temperament, she did not distort it or rest satisfied with a superficial caricature. Lady Morgan was kind enough to the peasants; but, for her, Irish grievances centred in the disinherited nobility and gentry, Ireland's rightful leaders, whose reinstatement would be the restoration of the age of gold.

Her next political story, *Florence M'Carthy* (1816), has the *Later* indispensable love-tale, but is of mediocre interest except for *national tales* the satire, or rather the invective, hurled at those place-men, "the desk aristocracy," who acted as informers, Government hirelings fomenting sedition, butchering magistrates, and the like, during the years of unrest. John Wilson Croker, who had assailed Lady Morgan with scurrilous abuse in the *Quarterly Review*, is caricatured as one of this pack in Counsellor Con Crawley. She was a privileged spectator of Irish history during the years of her Dublin life, though it was of course her own interpretation that she swore by. *The O'Briens and the O'Flaherties* (1827), the last of her national tales, is more like a series of memoirs reviewing the period 1782-1800, and exhuming solid fragments from the Middle Ages and later times to give further weight to her accusations, than a regular novel; but, though she wrote as a pamphleteer, her record is still one of the liveliest extant of the doings of the Volunteers and of the United Irishmen, who were contending for reform and drifting into rebellion. Lord Edward Fitzgerald appears under the alias of Lord Walter Fitzwalter. Her style had improved. Many scenes in this book are as good as anything in Lever, without his persistent farce and horseplay. She makes her hits with mockery, instead of practical joking. But, like most of her compatriots, she overdoes the conversations.

<sup>1</sup> There had been stage Irishmen before, as Sheridan's Sir Lucius O'Trigger is enough to remind us. Bernard Shaw's play, *John Bull's Other Island* (1907), dealt the myth a final blow. Irish poets, dramatists, and novelists, scouting all this antiquated nonsense, were by that time giving the world a truer picture than even Carleton had been able to present, hampered as he was by his own and his readers' prejudices. On Maria Edgeworth's drawing of Irish peasants, see Volume VI., especially pp. 29-30.



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They would, if they could, tell the whole story by means of talk, and very discursive talk.

*"Dram-  
atic  
Scenes  
from Real  
Life"* In her *Dramatic Scenes from Real Life* (1833) Lady Morgan actually succeeded in doing this, though she was not aiming at the stage. The contents, "Manor Sackville," "The Easter Recess," and "Temper," are to be read as novels; they are "a thing that may be read running, or dancing, like a puff on a dead wall, or a sentiment on a French fan," says the preface. The humorous character-sketching and the brisk dialogue in the first show that it is not fair to judge her only by *The Wild Irish Girl*. Mr Galbraith, sub-agent in charge of the estates of the English absentee, Henry Lumley Sackville, has been explaining to Lady Emily why it is that he is not one of the O's and Macs, with a name ending in augh or clough. She must make up her mind to live with the people who matter, the estated families, the Protestants.

Lady Emily (interrupting him impatiently). "But I don't want to live with those people. I want something so very Irish, you know; such as one sees on the stage, and in the Irish novels, and that do such funny things, and are so amusing. Haven't we any papists at all on our estates?"

Mr Galbraith (with a peculiar draw up of his mouth and eyebrows). "Plinty, my leedy. All the pisantry, to a man, are the blackest of peepists."

Lady Emily. "Oh! I am delighted! I will go and see them all. I know I shall so like a black papist! Pray what is the *costume* here? Do you know, I have an idea in my head, Mr Gillespie; I have told you, I mean to dress them all like the peasantry of the Campagna: for, you know, we are come to improve and do all the good we can. I am dying to do good here; and we have but six weeks to stay, so now you must help us. Do you think the poor people would exchange their old national dress for one more picturesque?"

Mr Galbraith (with a humorous smile). "Troth! I'm sure they would, my leedy, with all the veins; and sorrow much trouble that would teak them. For few has more nor two suits;—that is, put an, and teak off; and not that same always."

Lady Emily. "Well, that then is settled. I'll show you the model-dress. All the materials must be Irish, you know.

Only consider what good it *will* do! I don't know yet how many thousand yards of stuff and cloth it will take; but I believe there is nothing like encouraging the Irish manufacture.<sup>1</sup>

But the Irish school of novelists dates properly from 1825, *Novelists* when the Banim brothers published the first of their *Tales of the by the O'Hara Family*; for, after all, Maria Edgeworth was *peasantry* more English than Irish, and was by no means regarded as one of themselves by her Irish colleagues, and Lady Morgan was only a hanger-on to the skirts of literature. In date and some other respects, the group headed by the Banims and Carleton stand in somewhat the same relation to Miss Edgeworth as the Lowland novelists headed by Galt and Miss Ferrier stood to Scott; but in everything of importance it is the converse that holds good. Although they wrote about their own people and were not wilfully untruthful, they liked romance too much themselves, or gave in too much to the popular craving for romance, to be content with the unexciting realism of Miss Edgeworth; and their very desire to show that Irish life could yield fiction as rich as Scott's still further misled them. They relied far too much on the odd charm of national idiosyncrasies, of manners and customs strange and quaint to the English. They are illustrators, rather than disinterested artists. Often the story is forgotten whilst the writer expatiates, like a showman, on the motley garb, the strange habits, the picturesque idioms, and the curious superstitions that characterize a race so different from the ordinary population of a novel. The whole environment of such a queer variety of mankind must be carefully described. The scene-painting overshadows the play. Then they must emulate Scott's pictorial brilliance, and went wrong again in thinking that scenery is wanted in a novel for its own sake, rather than as contributing to the dramatic effect. Even Carleton, the best of them, continually errs in this respect. He calls one of his stories, for instance, "The Midnight Mass," and devotes more than half of it to a spectacular

<sup>1</sup> *Dramatic Scenes*, i. 87-88. Lady Blessington's novel, *The Repealers, or Grace Cassidy* (1833), if such a medley of talk and discussion can be called a novel, may be affiliated with Lady Morgan's fiction.

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account of this impressive ceremony. The real subject, a murder instigated by jealousy, falls into a sort of appendix; the connexion seems almost accidental. The description is well done, but the reader is put on a false scent. Carleton constantly assumes the part of guide and commentator, calling attention to this or that peculiarity, explaining the unusual, and translating oddities of speech into English with Gaelic terms and local sayings italicized. But, above and beyond all this, the peasant novelists were too much weighed down and embittered by their sense of injustice to be impartial. At their most realistic, their realism is an exposure, a protest, an indictment, an appeal to the conscience of the powerful and inattentive neighbours who allowed such things to be, who were historically the guilty party.

*The  
Banim:*

The two Banims were of the peasant class, and presented the Irish case as the peasants saw it. There is little to choose between them in ability or in the tone and colour of their work, except that John was more inclined to gloom and despair, and apt to dwell upon the passionate and savage traits in the Celtic temperament more than his brother. They were a congenial pair of collaborators, and at times both pens shared harmoniously in one and the same story. They were sons of a farmer and shopkeeper at Kilkenny, who gave them a fair education, before misfortunes in business left them to struggle on his account as well as their own. John Banim (1798-1842) was at first a drawing-master at a school in his native town. A warm attachment to a girl who was his social superior ended in her illness and death, and a breakdown in body and mind from which he never entirely recovered. He afterwards married. But he had by that time ventured everything on a literary career. After two lean years in Dublin he had a tragedy accepted by Macready, and was encouraged to go to London; and there he and his wife went through the same experiences of poverty and illness which were to be the fate of the peasant priest and the girl of higher station who sacrifice all for love in *The Nowlans*. Banim's health gave way again; and at Boulogne, where he had hoped for restoration, he fell a victim to cholera, and was brought home by his

brother paralysed and a complete wreck. The success of the three series of *O'Hara Tales* (1825-1829) and of his novel, *The Boyne Water* (1826), came too late. He lingered on till he was forty-four, but henceforth only contributed an odd page or so to his brother's stories. Michael Banim (1796-1874), the elder brother, started to read law, but took over his father's business after the failure, which was not the last of his financial troubles. Induced to collaborate in the first series of *O'Hara Tales*, he continued to write, independently or in concert with his brother. He was a man of fine character, and took an active part in the movement for Catholic emancipation.

Their *Tales by the O'Hara Family* were expressly intended "O'Hara to do for Ireland what the Waverley novels had done for *Tales*" Scotland. The Banims also proposed, "To insinuate, through fiction, the causes of Irish discontent, and to insinuate also that if crime were consequent on discontent it was no great wonder; the conclusion to be arrived at by the reader, not by insisting on it on the part of the author, but from sympathy with the criminals." The first tale, *John Doe, or the Peep o' Day*, was written, all but the first chapter, by John Banim. It is about the Shanavests, one of the peasant societies who took the law into their own hands against rack-renters and tithe-proctors. Their chieftain, John Doe, however, actuated by motives with which anyone must sympathize, is of the same literary tradition as the Karl Moor of Schiller's *Robbers* or the English Robin Hood. He executes terrible justice on the iniquitous middleman who has robbed him of his patrimony, hounded his mother to death, and ruined his sister. Two English officers sent to hunt down John Doe in his fastness among the mountains of Clonmel, outwitted by his strategy, are magnanimously liberated; one of them tells the story. Another philanthropic outlaw with a well-drilled band plays an inferior part in *Peter of the Castle*, one of the second series of *O'Hara Tales* (1826). He is the principal agent in restoring the young hero to the rank and property out of which he had been fraudulently ousted by the impostor calling himself the boy's guardian. This is a joint work, the picturesque opening chapters by Michael.

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*"Crohoore of the Bill-book"* Michael Banim's contribution to the first series had been *Crohoore of the Bill-book*, which is adorned with one of the most repellent examples of a tithe-proctor. "This is no fancy sketch," he says, "the Irish tithe-proctor of this day and the Irish tithe-proctor of fifty years ago are individuals of one and the same species." The ogre meets with his deserts in being captured by the Whiteboys, buried up to the chin, and cropped of his ears. Then the military arrive, and there is a sanguinary combat in which the soldiers are routed; but the peasants inevitably have the worst of it in the subsequent reprisals. Pierce Shea gets mixed up with the Whiteboys in his frenzied quest for his kidnapped sweetheart; but finds at last that the herculean dwarf Crohoore, who is believed to have carried her off and to be guilty of murdering his own benefactors in cold blood, has all along been protecting the girl against a more dangerous foe. Once again, the bandit, the terror of a whole county, turns out to be Providence in disguise. In fact, he is a changeling and the colleen's own brother. In the dock, after being convicted of a murder which he had not committed, he seizes the chief witness, the tithe-proctor, in his powerful grip, and proves him to be the guilty party. Melodrama is rather clumsily blended with Celtic superstitions; the phookas and leprechauns which are so horribly real to the sensuous imagination of the Irish mingle only too well with the terrors that were actually walking by night in the wild fringes of the Kilkenny hills. John Banim also exploited the supernatural in an accompanying tale, *The Fetches*. A fetch is a spirit that appears to the relations or friends of persons about to die. Two lovers, demoralized by superstitions which the writer more than half believes in, see each others' fetches. The youth expires, and the girl flings herself with his body still warm in her arms into a boiling torrent.

*"The Boyne Water"* The most ambitious attempt to rival Scott's historical novels was *The Boyne Water* (1826), by John Banim, which deals in a manner like that of *Old Mortality* with the whole course of the struggle between the Irish supporters of James II and the Protestants who were presently led by William of Orange, interweaving a twofold love-story with the historical

events. Tyrconnel's lord-lieutenancy and the short-lived re-establishment of the Catholic domination, the outbreak of hostilities, the siege of Londonderry, battle of the Boyne, and fall of Limerick, are the capital episodes. It is painstaking and conscientious, but too heavily packed with historical detail and long discussions on the general situation and the mixed motives of the chief actors. *The Denounced, or the Last Baron of Crana* (1826), also by John Banim, takes up the historical thread with the battle of Aughrim. It has no literary value, but illustrates the intolerable sufferings of Catholics under penal laws that forbade them to hold property, to practise their religion, or absent themselves from worship in the Protestant churches. The last baron sees no choice left but to join the thievish rapparees. In *The Conformists* (1829) John similarly shows the monstrous state of things resulting in the reign of George II from the penal laws, in the matter of education. A son who has been jailed for receiving instruction from a hedge schoolmaster turns Protestant, and so ousts his father from the estates, to avenge himself for the family's supposed opposition to his marriage.

But Michael Banim was better than John on an historical "*The subject nearer home in both time and place. The Croppy, a Croppy*" tale of 1798 (1828), is no masterpiece. It falls into two badly fitted halves: the historical narrative, based on local knowledge and intimate understanding of the peasants, though sensational and overstrained; and the inescapable love-tale, stilted, mawkish, and extravagant. But the great fault of the Banims and most of those who depict the peasant is the long-windedness of the speeches. That a native will never speak to the point is an amusing trait; the Banims thought it so amusing that they rehearsed all the circumlocutions at full length. Michael gives an excellent account of the formation of the Irish Volunteers at the time of the American war of independence, the effect of the French Revolution in stimulating the activities of the United Irishmen, and the dire results of the prevalent belief that the Orangemen meant to exterminate the Catholics.

"Curnel Barry 'ud ate a Catholic iv Good Friday, and ax no sauce to his mate."

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The Croppy's oath to resist with every weapon that could be forged, stolen, or made to do duty, was the natural answer to the threat "to wade ankle-deep in Papist blood." Ghastly scenes of outrage and oppression usher in the actual outbreak. The incident of the blacksmith's innocent boy, who is half-hanged several times and then finished by the yeomanry patrol, is an example of the brutalities which generated and exacerbated the rebellion.

"*The Nowlans*" Superior to these ventures into history is John Banim's poignant study of the temptation and fall of a young priest, in *The Nowlans* (which was included with *Peter of the Castle* in the second set of *O'Hara Tales*, 1826). It is on a broad and crowded canvas. A debauched squireen, with his wives and a horde of children, in a tumble-down mansion besieged by parasites and duns, is the centre-piece of a caustic picture of laziness, vice, and squalor, obviously painted as a warning. This is Aby Nowlan, the kinsman with the fortune, to whom the poor but respectable Nowlans are the shining contrast. Their son, John Nowlan, takes the vows of a priest, but falls madly in love, and runs off with a young lady, only to be ostracized and to bring her to misery and starvation. John Banim's youthful love tragedy and the sufferings of his married life give a cruel actuality to all this. But the tale was expanded into a novel, and there are more horrors in plenty. A vicious young Oxford man seduces, murders, and robs, and at last stabs himself in court to escape the hangman. Captain Rock and his gangs of cut-throats plunder the mail-coach, make a night attack on a mansion, and so on. Ghastly murder is perpetrated in a lodging-house, and witnessed by the terrified heroine through a chink in the partition. Catholic priests and an old friar do their best for the oppressed and misguided people, whose wrongs and whose crimes are laid to the account of the English regime, especially the established Church and the exactions of the tithe-proctors. A humorous portrait is attempted of an English missionary, "a gentle lunatic" with a fixed belief in the salvation of Ireland by the conversion of the peasants. John Banim's posthumous story, *The Changeling* (1848), has some graphic pictures of humanity and

their natural surroundings in Galway and Connemara; but as a whole is a weak effort in conventional fiction.

Michael Banim also wasted his talents and knowledge on *Other* the same worthless sentimentalism and melodrama in *The stories Ghost Hunter and his Family* (1833) and *The Mayor of Wind-Gap*, in the third series of *O'Hara Tales* (1834). The fact is, both brothers should have stuck to the short story. There are some admirable yarns and humorous glimpses of personality in *The Bit o' Writing*, a joint work; and *Father Connell* (1840), in which John Banim had a hand to some extent, is saved by the character of the simple, pious, humble, but lion-hearted priest, and the humour and pathos of Michael Banim's old neighbours in Kilkenny. It is perhaps the most satisfactory of his longer stories. *The Town of the Cascades* (1864) is not much more than an object-lesson on the evils of intemperance; the town is apparently Ennistymon, on its beautiful river-gorge in County Clare.

Another novelist of the peasantry, Gerald Griffin (1803–Gerald 1840), did not belong to them. He was born at Limerick, *Griffin* where his father, a brewer, was well enough off to have a country residence on the Shannon. Griffin played several parts. He was a minor poet of some charm, had an opera produced, and left a play to be brought out after his death by Macready, at Drury Lane. He was a keen sportsman, an antiquary, a folklorist, and a prolific miscellaneous author, leaving as many works in manuscript behind him as those published in his short life. Unfortunately, he took his talents too seriously, went to London and starved as a hack, and made a hit with his *Tales of the Munster Festivals* (1827) and a good novel, *The Collegians* (1828), only when his health was undermined. As his stories show, Griffin was deeply religious, and two years before he died he became a member of the Christian Brothers. Like the Banims and Carleton, he digressed into historical fiction: *The Invasion* (1832), more painstaking than accurate, goes back to the era of the Danish incursions, *The Duke of Monmouth* (1842) is one of the host of worthless novels about Sedgemoor.

But Griffin knew and loved the peasants, and was safe as



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"*Tales  
of the  
Munster  
Festi-  
vals*"

long as he confined himself to them and his own order, the provincial middle class. In the three series of *Tales of the Munster Festivals* (1827-1832) he dealt with the peasants of Counties Clare and Limerick and the fisher-folk of Kerry, with the lesser gentry and tradespeople to whom he belonged, and with those hated German immigrants, the Palatines, who had been brought over to County Limerick when the penal laws had reduced agriculture to a low ebb. Griffin was fascinated by the darker passions of the Celt, the adventurous and lawless life of the fishermen and smugglers, and the gloomy superstitions which had their home in the rugged seaboard and lonely moorlands of the west. Exploits against the revenue officers, relentless feuds, murder and remorse, illicit love, and the doings of the secret brotherhoods, were his chosen themes; and he made the most of the romantic scenery. "Suil Dhuv the Coiner," in which the Palatines figure; "The Aylmers of Ballyaylmer," a tale of smuggling and small gentfolk in Kerry; "The Barber of Bantry" and "The Half-Sir," dealing with those who were "betuxt and betune, as you may say," disliked by the peasants and cold-shouldered by the gentry, and such sensational pieces as "The Rivals" and "Tracy's Ambition," illustrate Griffin's strength and humour in drawing well-marked types.

"*The  
Collegi-  
ans*"

*The Collegians, a Tale of Garryowen* (1828), out of which Dion Boucicault made a very popular melodrama, *The Colleen Bawn*, is a novel amalgamating all these elements. A young fellow of the better classes in Limerick runs off with a rope-maker's beautiful daughter, and marries her, but secretly, so that he can easily repudiate the tie if occasion arises. His domineering mother, to whose upbringing he largely owes his harsh and egotistic disposition, pushes him into a match with an heiress. But at the critical moment it comes out that his devoted and dog-like servant, at his bidding or with his tacit consent, has done the unhappy girl to death, and he is sentenced to penal servitude. The villain, though popular for his dashing personal advantages, is a coarse-minded brute, who fails to excite the dramatic sympathy which Griffin

evidently counted upon. As to his mother, Mrs Cregan cannot believe that peasants have feelings:

"My darling child! you afflict yourself too earnestly. Say what you will, there are few natures nursed in an Irish cabin that are capable of suffering so keenly the endurance of any disappointment as you do the inflicting it."

The gentlefolk, indeed, are a reckless, drinking, dicing, sporting, and duelling set, who treat their underlings with wanton brutality, and are more responsible even than the Government for Irish disaffection. There is naturally not much civilization among the peasants: it is a few homely and would-be law-abiding individuals in the novels of the Banims, Griffin, and Carleton who possess all the social virtues. But they are picturesque, and can sing a song or tell a story with the best. Griffin is always ready with his own samples of both, such as the barber's story of his father with which he bores Hardress Cregan:

"That's just biddin' me go on with my story, sir, for the more I talk the faster I work, for ever. Just turn your head this way, sir, if you please. My father—a little more to the light, sir—my father was sittin' one fine mornin' in his little shop, curlin' a front curl belongin' to a lady (we won't mention who) in the neighbourhood, with the sun shinin' in the doore, and he singin' a little song to himself; an' meself, a craithur, sittin' by the fire, lookin' about me, an' sayin' nothin'. Very well; all of a sudden a gentleman, tall and well mounted, rode up to the doore, an'—'Hello!' says he, callin' out, 'can I get myself shaved here?' says he. 'Why not, plase your honour,' says my father, startin' up, and layin' by the front out of his hand. So he 'lit off his horse, an' come in. He was a mighty bould, fierce-looking gentleman, with a tundherin' long sword be his side, down, an' a pair o' whiskers as big an' as red as a fox's brush, an' eyes as red as them two bull's eyes in the window-panes, an' they havin' a strange twisht in 'em, so that when he'd be lookin' you sthraight in the face, you'd think it's out at the door he'd be lookin'. Besides that, when he'd spake, he used to give himself a loud roisterin' way, as if you were a mile off, an' not willin' to come nearer or to be said by him. 'Do you mind now,' says he—an' he takin' a chair oppozzite the windee, while

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my father smartened himself, an' bate up a lather—'ever and alwas, since I was the height of a bee's knee,' says he, 'I had a mortal enmity to seein' a drop o' my own blood, an' I'll tell you what it is,' says he. 'What is it, sir?' says my father. 'I'll make a clear bargain with you now,' says the gentleman. So he took out a half-crown, an' laid it upon the table, an' after that he drew his swoord, and laid it hard by the half-crown. 'Do you see them two now?' says he. 'I do, surely,' says my father. 'The half-crown will be yours,' says the gentleman, 'if you'll shave me without drawin' my blood; but if I see as much as would make a breakfast for—(he named an animal that I wont mention after him now)—if I see as much after you,' says he, 'I'll run this swoord through your body, as sure as there's mait in mutton. So look before you lep; if you won't take the bargain, say it, and let me ride away,' says he. This was in times when a gentleman that way, would think as little a'most of doin' a thing o' the kind to a poor Catholic as he would now of sayin' it; so well became my father to look to himself. 'You'll never have it to say o' me,' says my father, 'that I wouldn't trust my hand so *far* at any rate in the business I was bred to.' So to it they fell, an' as Providence ordered it, my father shaved him without one gash, an' put the half-crown in his pocket. 'Well, now 'tis done,' says the gentleman, 'but you're a foolish man.' 'How so, sir?' says my father. 'Because, so sure as I saw the blood,' says the other, 'I'd make my word good.' 'But you never would see the blood, sir,' says my father quite easy, 'because I'd see it before you, an' I'd cut your thoath with the razhur.' Well, 'twas as good as a play to see the look the gentleman gave him when he said that. He didn't answer him a word, but mounted his horse, and rode away."<sup>1</sup>

Of course, there is an occasional bull: "Can you speak English, fellow?" "Not a word, plase your honour." Nor would an Irish novel be really Irish without fairies and fetches, witches and leprechauns. Croker was gathering in his legends at the time Griffin was writing. Carleton was about to weave them into his stories with more artistic tact than anyone. Like the Banims, Griffin often seems not quite sure whether he is writing a dramatic story or simply illustrating Irish life. The story halts or goes on by fits and starts between the

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xxx.

descriptions of people, dress, manners, sports and games, meals, funerals, superstitions. All the native novelists were prone to over-writing. They are like amateurs clumsily putting on a professional air, and serving up such a pretence at natural conversation as this:

"The longer I live," Kyrle said at length, with some hesitation in his manner, "the longer I live in this luckless condition, and the oftener I think of that excellent girl, the more deep and settled is the hold which she has taken of my imagination. I wonder, Hardress, how you can be so indifferent to her acquaintance. Placing my own unfortunate affection altogether out of view, I can scarcely imagine an enjoyment more desirable than that of cultivating the society of so amiable a creature."

Here he drew a long sigh, and replenished the void thus occasioned, by having recourse to the bowl and ladle.

William Hamilton Maxwell (1792-1850), who was bribed *W. H.* by the fallacious promise of a relative's estate to give up *Maxwell* soldiering<sup>1</sup> and enter the Church, had a living in a sporting district of Iar Connaught, and set himself to enjoy the ample leisure afforded by the lack of a congregation. Lever was one of his boon companions, and is said to have taken over the rollicking novel from Maxwell. One of the jovial parson's best books, *Wild Sports of the West, with Legendary Tales and Local Sketches* (1833), is a miscellany of fishing, shooting, fox-hunting, sailing, dancing, and drinking anecdotes, local traditions, and portraits from life, some of the originals still walking the earth when it appeared. Compared with it, his historical novels, *O'Hara* (1825) and *The Dark Lady of Doona* (1836), are not even literature. But he struck a still more fertile vein in *Stories of Waterloo* (1829) and *Adventures of Captain Blake, or my Life* (1835), a rambling story of County Galway and of the Peninsula, followed by *The Bivouac, Stories of the Peninsular War* (1837). These were the same sort of

<sup>1</sup> W. J. Fitzpatrick roundly asserts: "Maxwell had never been in the army—the published statements to the contrary notwithstanding" (*Life of Lever*, 99). On the other hand, the *D.N.B.* gives doubtful particulars of the record of a Hamilton Maxwell, who may be identified with W. H. Maxwell. His knowledge of military history seems too practical and intimate to be consistent with Fitzpatrick's statement.

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free-and-easy improvisations as the better-known *Harry Lorrequer*, *Charles O'Malley*, and *Tom Burke of Ours*; but in the military experiences Maxwell the ex-serviceman of the Peninsula and Waterloo had the advantage of Lever, who had to get up his history from Napier. Maxwell was the author of a life of Wellington.

*Croker's  
fairy-  
tales*

Thomas Crofton Croker (1798–1854) had now for some time been collecting his Irish minstrelsy and folk-lore; and no doubt to the interest he excited must be largely ascribed the wealth of Irish legend embodied in the work of Griffin and Maxwell, Carleton and Samuel Lover. In the *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (1825), Croker, to be followed a decade or two later by a younger compiler, Patrick Kennedy, was the first in a field which has since been more thoroughly and more scientifically explored, by Standish Hayes O'Grady, T. W. Rolleston, Jeremiah Curtin, Douglas Hyde, Lady Gregory, Dr Robin Flower, and still others. He threw the legendary material into the form of a popular guide, in his *Legends of the Lakes, or Sayings and Doings at Killarney* (1829), and *Killarney Legends* (1831), retelling the stories in the spirited, idiomatic form in which he had heard them, but in an anglicization of the brogue. Crofton's fairies are very jolly people, though dangerous to offend. The Irish peasant believes so firmly in their existence, nay, in their continual proximity, they are so large an element in his life, that the novelist cannot ignore them.

*Mrs S. C.  
Hall*

As one in good odour at the circulating libraries, the Anglo-Irishwoman, Anna Maria Fielding (1800–1881), better known by her married name as Mrs S. C. Hall, must not be ignored, even if now she is never to be read again. She left Ireland at the age of fifteen, but continued to write industriously on the peasants whom she had known in County Wexford. She tried to immortalize her village of Bannow in the style of Miss Mitford, in *Sketches of Irish Character* (1829), and she is an inferior Miss Edgeworth in *Lights and Shadows of Irish Life* (1838) and *Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1840). A later collection, *Nelly Nowlan, and other Stories* (1865), is a sort of popular anthology of her best. Her novel, *The Whiteboy*, a

*Story of Ireland in 1822* (1845), describes the coming of a young Englishman to the estate he has inherited in County Cork at the moment when the Whiteboys are burning and slaughtering or running away from the military and gentry. The heavy moralism and the optimistic complacency with which she proffers remedies for Irish ills go admirably with the shallowness of Mrs Hall's pretence at realism. But she was the wife of the editor of *The Amulet* and other periodicals of contemporary standing<sup>1</sup>; her books came out charmingly illustrated by admired Victorian artists, were approved by reviewers, and went into edition after edition.

Greater than any of his native rivals, William Carleton (1794–*William* 1869), born in Tyrone, on the Celtic fringe, was the child *Carleton* of humble parents, but had the luck of genius in his parentage, and even in the misfortunes of his boyhood and manhood. Of his parents he says in his *Autobiography*:

It would be difficult, however, if not impossible, to find two persons in their lowly station so highly and singularly gifted. My father possessed a memory not merely great or surprising, but absolutely astonishing. He would repeat nearly the whole of the Old and New Testaments by heart, and was besides a living index to almost every chapter and verse in them. . . . My native place was a spot rife with old legends, tales, traditions, customs, and superstitions, so that in my early youth, even beyond the walls of my own humble roof, they met me in every direction. It was at home, however, and from my father's lips in particular, that they were perpetually sounding in my ears. In fact, his memory was a perfect storehouse, and a rich one, of all that the social antiquary, the man of letters, the poet, or the musician would consider valuable.<sup>2</sup>

His mother had an exquisite voice, and was in great request as a singer of old Irish songs, at wakes, dances, fairs, and other festivities; he portrayed her in the martyred wife of Fardarougha the Miser, in the novel of that name. They destined

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Carter Hall, author of a *Retrospect of a Long Life*, which is interesting on himself and others, was for a time Theodore Hook's sub-editor on *John Bull*. Tradition has it that he was Mr Pecksniff's original.

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiography*, incorporated in *The Life of Carleton*, by D. J. O'Donoghue, 1896, i. 5–6.

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the boy for the priesthood; and Carleton relates how he sat under one hedge schoolmaster after another, hunting from place to place for education in the classics, like a tramp looking for work. Many of the stories in his five volumes of *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* are avowedly reminiscences. Carleton's great gift was not invention, but an extraordinary memory retaining all that he had consciously or unconsciously observed.

There never was any man of letters who had an opportunity of knowing and describing the manners of the Irish people so thoroughly as I had. I was one of themselves, and mingled in all those sports and pastimes in which their characters are most clearly developed. Talking simply of the peasantry, there is scarcely a phase of their life with which I was not intimate.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the experiences recorded have that touch of imagination, consistent with perfect truth, which is characteristic of the highest fiction. Such is the account of his youthful love for Anne Duffy, who was to be another man's wife before they both, in the presence of her husband, confessed their reciprocal but unspoken affection in the years gone by. He says, in reviewing the course of his life: "From some of those incidents any man of feeling would shrink with shame, and a bitterness of recollection that often almost drove me into a blasphemous ingratitude for the curse of my very existence. I have gone through scenes which, if related, would strip my narrative or my suffering of all claims to the dignity of ordinary experience."<sup>2</sup> For Carleton, like his own Dennis O'Shaughnessy, gave up his design to become a priest; the reasons for his disillusionment are adumbrated in that extraordinary but veracious story, *The Lough Derg Pilgrim* (1829), afterwards included in the *Traits and Stories*. His family were sinking into poverty, and to his hard-working brothers his life must have seemed a species of malingering. Nothing had come of his wonderful scholarship, and Carleton had so far shown no genius for anything but to enjoy existence, and to distinguish himself as a dancer, a wrestler, and a butterfly. The

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, 148.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-188.

next period of his life makes painful reading. Often penniless, obliged to pledge his shirt to pay for a bed, lodging in the lowest dens in Dublin, tramping the roads, and reduced to the most humiliating shifts, he yet kept alive his love of learning, was careful even of his appearance, and never lost the belief in his own genius. He would be the Irish *Gil Blas*. "I did not then even know that it was fiction, but took it for granted that all the adventures were true." So much the deeper the effect upon his imagination. He sought employment as a tutor or schoolmaster, and obtained several posts; once he was a hedge schoolmaster himself; but there were intervals of destitution, during one of which he discovered his talent for story-telling. He had been very kindly treated at Dundalk, and did not know how to repay his hosts. "The only equivalent I could bestow," said he, "was the narrative of the old classical legends, which I transmogrified and changed into an incredible variety of shapes. I would have given them Irish legends, and sometimes did, but then the Irish legends did not show the 'larnin.'" <sup>1</sup> Even when he became famous, Carleton's troubles were not over; his books never earned him a competency, and his unbusinesslike habits kept him poor.

One of his later novels, *The Black Prophet*, might have brought him a large sum, if he had not sold the copyright cheap. He was granted £200 a year from the Civil List in 1848, Maria Edgeworth being among those who signed the memorial. But debts, literary jealousies, and the odium he brought upon himself by foolish outbreaks of party spirit, harassed him to the end, and his widow and daughters would have been left in destitution had not his dying request to the Lord Chancellor obtained them an annuity of £100.

Carleton afterwards wrote two novels which are great in "Traits spite of lapses that stare the reader in the face. But he himself and his adventures, and all that he knew of the Irish peasants, <sup>Stories of the Irish Peasantry</sup> are contained in his *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1830-1833), the first series in two, the second in three volumes. A large part of the contents appeared originally in the *Christian Examiner* or the *National Magazine*. Carleton was not one

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.



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of those who sneered at Miss Edgeworth's portraiture of the Irish; he spoke of *Castle Rackrent* as "inimitable." But, like the Banims and Griffin, he owed more than he knew to Scott, to whom he had a strong facial resemblance of which he was proud. The influences that impelled him to write were many and various; that of Le Sage has already been mentioned. Most of all it was the wealth of experience that overflowed his brain. His biographer says: "His intention was not to amuse, but to inform and to reform. He took up the problem of Irish life and Irish manners with the desire of solving it."<sup>1</sup> Such a motive was often before his mind, and for the most part it had deleterious effects upon his truth and spontaneity. But his finest work was produced when he was simply reliving in imagination all that he had stored in his memory, painting the "Traits" or doing his best to tell the "Stories." Like the Banims and Griffin, again, he sometimes betrays an excessive anxiety to exhibit the Irish in all their native picturesqueness and uncouthness for the astonishment of the world. Miss Edgeworth's Thady, in *Castle Rackrent*, showed no such affectation, but told his story as he saw it in his own mind, without a touch of consciousness or exaggeration.

"Ned M'Keown" M'Keown and Nancy his wife, Pat Frayne, his own hedge and "The Three Tasks" schoolmaster, and the other personages, with three or four village gossoons, sitting round the fire in Ned M'Keown's cabin, and telling each other stories. In this unstudied, colloquial way, such a wild fancy, for instance, as "The Three Tasks," as full of Celtic magic as any of Crofton Croker's, goes more smoothly than Croker at his very best. It is a fairy-tale as mad as anything in the *Mabinogion*; about the cleaning of the black man's stables, where at every shovelful that Jack removes three more come tumbling in; and of the capture of the supernatural filly, and the robbing of the crane's nest on the inaccessible island. All these tasks Jack Magennis performs by the aid of a beautiful lady, whom he straightway forgets as if he had waked out of a dream. But she reappears when Jack is about to lead the wrong bride to the altar, takes

<sup>1</sup> O'Donoghue, Preface, x.

her place, and they live together happy and rich ever after. "Phil  
 In "Phil Purcel the Pig-driver" the extravaganza is more <sup>Purcel the</sup>  
 mundane; the two most far-fetched incidents are stated to <sup>Pig-</sup>  
 be not fictitious. But the "facts," how the blarneying Phil <sup>driver "</sup>  
 disposes of his pig over and over again, to upwards of two  
 dozen English purchasers, and brings the animal safely back  
 to Ireland, and how the harvesters on the steamer at Liverpool  
 fight a battle on deck with much slaughter to settle whether  
 the Connaught men or the Munster men should be taken  
 home in the overcrowded boat, are fully as incredible as the  
 fantastic character-drawing of Phil's athletic pigs in their  
 Irish habitat.

"That breed's *true* Hirish; but I'se try and sell 'em to  
 Squoire Jolly to hunt wi' the beagles, for he wants a pack.  
 They do say all the swoine that the deevils were put into ha'  
 been drawned; but for my peart, I'se sure that some on un  
 must ha' escaped to Hireland."

Carleton's exuberance and his passion for hyperbole were  
 authentically the same as the imagination which begat the  
 Celtic wonder-stories.

But, as already noted, he had not much invention; and, *Carleton's*  
 miscellaneous though his experience was, both the traits and *failings*  
 the stories may be classified into a few standard patterns  
 and their variations. These are more numerous than those of  
 the Banims, Griffin, and the rest, and they are truer to nature.  
 Yet even Carleton had his share in the evolution of the stage  
 Irishman, through his congenital love of capering and clowning.  
 And he ought to have kept to the short story, the shorter the  
 better. The moment he begins to expand, he can only water  
 his whisky or substitute a less exhilarating beverage. His  
 idea of developing a story was to pad it out with formal  
 descriptions, or pack it with fresh incidents, only fortuitously  
 connected with what had gone before. His dialogue is racy,  
 but every time he turns the tap on he lets it run to waste.  
 The same joke is repeated, the bantering conversations go  
 on and on till they are done to death. Evidently, the editors  
 of the magazines in which the early tales appeared were sparing  
 of blue pencil, and Carleton remained unaware of his weakness.

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He could never refrain from an improving comment, and was always censuring or abusing someone or something, especially English misgovernment and his bugbear, the secret societies. His frailties were the correlative of his genius, an unchastened genius. Exuberance and hyperbole went now to extravaganza, and now to the cruder excess of mere iteration and redundancy.

*“Neal Malone”* So much for the discount which must nearly always be deducted; now for the credit side of the balance sheet. Take “Neal Malone,” the personification of Irish pugnacity and braggadocio. Neal, the tailor, about four feet high, “paced the earth with the courage and confidence of a giant.” But no one will quarrel with him; “I’m blue-mowlded for want of a batin’,” he bitterly complains. He confides his unhappiness to a married neighbour, and receives a piece of brotherly advice.

“Your spirit is too martial for a pacific life. If you follow my advice, I will teach you how to ripple the calm current of your existence to some purpose. *Marry a wife.* For twenty-five years I have given instruction in three branches, viz., philosophy, knowledge, and mathematics—I am also well versed in matrimony, and I declare that, upon my misery, and by the contents of all my afflictions, it is my solemn and melancholy opinion, that, if you marry a wife, you will, before three months pass over your concatenated state, not have a single complaint to make touching a superabundance of peace and tranquillity, or a love of fighting.”

Neal takes a wife, and the spell works. In fact, he loses all his plumpness as well as his lustihood. One evening he is donning his best apparel, which hangs woefully loose on his emaciated frame.

“Neal,” said his wife, on perceiving him drest, “where are you bound for?”

“Faith, *for life*,” replied Neal, with a mitigated swagger: “and I’d as soon, if it had been the will of Provid——”

He paused.

“Where are you going?” asked his wife a second time.

“Why,” he answered, “only to the dance at Jemmy Connolly’s; I’ll be back early.”

“Don’t go,” said the wife.

"I'll go," said Neal, "if the whole counthry was to prevint me. Thunder an' lightnin', woman, who am I?" he exclaimed in a loud but rather infirm voice; "amn't I Neal Malone, that never met a *man* who'd fight him! Neal Malone, that was never beat by *man*! Why, tare-an'-ounze, woman! Whoo! I'll get enraged some time, an' play the divil! Who's afeard, I say?"

"*Don't go*," added the wife a third time, giving Neal a significant look in the face.

*In about another half-hour Neal sat down quietly to his business instead of going to the dance.*

Soon after this, Neal one evening met Mr O'Connor by chance upon a plank which crossed a river. This plank was only a foot in breadth, so that no two individuals could pass each other upon it. We cannot find words in which to express the dismay of both on finding that they absolutely glided past one another without collision.

"The Party Fight and Funeral" deals epically, and not "*The* mock-epically, with the more desperate pugnacity of Ribbon-*Party* men and Orangemen, a detested theme which Carleton could not take up without inlaying his humour with pathos and indignation. Once he is touched, he never stints his pathos. Obviously, this was an account of a thing seen, which is the reason for a certain disunity and for the changes of tone. Extravagance there is, in plenty, in "*The Hedge School*"; but it is the merry conceit of reminiscence, delighting in the absurdity of what was once only too real. Mat Kavanagh, Philomath and Professor of the Learned Languages, abducted in his cups by the boys of Findramore, who were determined to have the best schoolmaster the whole countryside could show, is no doubt a fancy sketch of Carleton's own dominie, Pat Frayne. There are many of these rustic luminaries in the *Traits and Stories*. "*Phelim O'Toole's Courtship*" is "*Phelim* another magnificent drollery, the hero a bouncing, cunning, impudent gossoon, whose laziness, rascality, and conceit mark him as a candidate for the gallows. The climax of his blarneying is to wheedle three amorous women, and contrive to have the banns called for himself and all three at once. The mirth

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of the congregation and the priest's sarcastic homily are by no means adequate poetic justice, and the reader is gratified when the rogue gets his sentence of transportation for life.

*"Dennis O'Shaughnessy" and "The Poor Scholar"* Two tales are more directly autobiographical than any of the foregoing, "Dennis O'Shaughnessy going to Maynooth" and "The Poor Scholar"; in the latter, pathos and indignation are in the dominant, the other is a more frolicsome version of the same personal experiences. In both tales, a lad is designed for the priesthood; and by accepting privations, collections from friends and neighbours, and the backstairs influence of a priest, who expects a valuable present, he gets to Maynooth, but does not escape disillusionment. "The Poor Scholar" grew into a typical history of Irish character, and an affecting exposure of the hardships and brutalities meted out to the poor and helpless. It is a very serious story. But there is comedy to relieve the strain, such as the dressing-down of Peter Donovan by the hedge priest, for not subscribing to the fund for Jemmy's scholarship, to the uproarious delight of the congregation.

"Pether, you Turk, will your heart never soften—will you never have dacency, an' you the only man of your family that's so? Sure they say you're going to be marrid some of these days. Well, if you get your wife in my parish, I tell you, Pether, I'll give you a fleecin', for don't think I'll marry you as chape as I would a poor honest man. I'll make you shell out the yellow boys, and 'tis that will go to your heart, you nager, you; and then I'll eat you out of house and home at the stations. May the Lord grant us, in the manetime, a dacent appetite, a blessing which I wish you all in the name of the, &c."

Jemmy, on his way to college, is accosted and fed and lodged even by the poorest; "his satchel of books was literally a passport to their hearts." But he finds himself the butt and victim of a pack of brutal urchins and of a knavish and tyrannical schoolmaster; he falls sick, and only after many tribulations does he become a priest, and able to save his father and the rest of the family from the rapacities of Yellow Sam, another villainous bailiff. Here perhaps Carleton

plagiarized from Maria Edgeworth. Jemmy persuades the colonel to come and look with his own eyes at the state of his tenantry, like Lord Colambre in *The Absentee*.<sup>1</sup> But Carleton's scene is more brutal and downright in its realism. Miss Edgeworth was less literal, but more dramatic. Carleton probably had a real case in his mind's eye; she probably invented a concise example. The inevitable comparison is very significant. "Dennis O'Shaughnessy" might have been the masterpiece of story-telling which it is often acclaimed if it had been less than half as long. There is too much merriment at the expense of the pseudo-polymaths, too much hair-splitting and dog-latin disputations, a little of which goes a long way. At the same time, it reads as if it had all been taken down in shorthand. Carleton's fault, as usual, was too much realism, not too little. Thus it is no flattering presentment that he offers of Dennis O'Shaughnessy, whether a reflection of himself or not. Dennis does not shine in the sentimental affair of the girl whom he leaves in the lurch. But, having quitted Maynooth, he returns to look after the farm when his father dies, and marries Susy after all.

Carleton comes nearer the Banims, though he keeps fairly free from melodrama, in half-a-dozen tales of a gloomier order. The true subject of "The Midnight Mass" is the storm in the mind of a vengeful peasant who shoots his rival in love, and when put to the ordeal of touch is denounced by the supposed corpse. He wanders off to the mountains, and shoots himself. The elaborate account of a great dance on Christmas Eve and the midnight Mass attended by thousands of worshippers bearing torches gives picturesque circumstance, but is not relevant; it is as if two different memories were hastily stitched together to make one piece. Carleton had reason to know the mentality which slips naturally into crime. He had been in close and disagreeable contact with the secret brotherhoods; and, so long as the exigencies of an otiose plot did not mislead him, he could anatomize the soul of the basest and most irreclaimable. In "The Donagh," a fiendish ruffian, of the stamp Ireland produced in those days of lawless

<sup>1</sup> Volume VI. 42.

gangsters, is brought to book through his brother's collapse at being called upon to forswear himself on a relic of awful sanctity. Carleton shows how Catholic religion and primordial superstition have become identified as a source of terror. Even that hideous desperado, the Big Mower, will not infringe the old taboo about Fridays.

"Howsomever, in regard o' that, why doesn't yourself give up fastin' from the mate of a Friday?"

"Do you want me to sthretch you on the hearth?" replied the savage, whilst his eyes kindled into fury, and his grim visage darkened into a Satanic expression. "I'll tache you to be puttin' me through my catechiz about atin' mate. I may manage that as I plase; it comes at first cost, anyhow; but no cross-questions to me about it, if you regard your health."

The only false touch is in the hardened scoundrel's contrition at the death of his daughter.

"Oh, what's comin' over me! I'm dizzy an' shiverin'! How cowl'd the day's got of a sudden! Hould up, *avourneen machree*! I was a bad man; but to you, Anne, I was *not* as I was to everyone! Darlin', oh, look at me with forgiveness in your eye, or, anyway, don't *curse* me! Oh! I'm far cowl'der now! Tell me that you forgive me, *acusbla oge machree*!—*Manim asthee hu*, darling say it. I darn't look to God! but oh! do you say the forgivin' word to your father before you die!"

"Father," said she, "I deserve this—it's only just. I had plotted with that divilish Martin to betray them all, except yourself, an' to get the reward; an' then we intended to go—an'—live at a distance—an' in wickedness—where we—might not be known—he's at our house—let him be—secured. Forgive me, father; you said so often that there was no thruth in religion—that I began to—think so. Oh!—God! have mercy upon me." And with these words she expired.

Carleton puts the reference to God in capital letters. A searching study of hardened villainy is turned into a tract. But the whole family are a brood of gaol-birds and gallows-birds from the nest, and this deathbed repentance is a lapse into sentimental didactics. Pagan superstition combines again with religion in "The Lianhan Shee," the torments of

conscience in a guilty priest and his paramour evoking an evil spirit, which drives him to madness and suicide. This is another of the stories affirmed to be "no fiction." "Wildgoose Lodge" is historical, the grim narrative of a hellish murder perpetrated by Ribbonmen; and so is "Tubber Derg, or the Red Well," another piteous story of absentee oppression and an agent's malignity, with a reasoned argument against the system.

Many of the *Traits and Stories* are as long as a good-sized "Fardarougha novel, in fact about the same length as *Fardarougha the Miser, rougha the Miser* or the *Convicts of Lismamona* (1839), which takes that fuller shape. In the preface to this, with his usual frankness, Carleton relates that his friends called him a very clever fellow, who knew Irish life remarkably well, but they thought "there was more of memory than imagination" in his writing. "He is a fine fellow in his way—that is, at a *short* story or so—but he wants invention, and has not strength of wing for a long-sustained flight. He will never be able to write a novel; and it is a pity." Quite unconscious that his friends were right, he says: "I thanked them, expressed my sense of their kind intentions . . . and sat down and wrote 'The Miser.'" *Fardarougha* is perhaps his greatest work: but it would have been greater had Carleton not complicated the tragic theme, as he had done so often in the *Traits and Stories*, with the fashionable paraphernalia of villainy, intrigue, and an unexpected happy ending.

The story of the miser and his wife and son, stripped of superfluities, is as simple as that of Shylock. An overmastering passion has warped the man's nature. The habit of thrift has grown into monomania. The old peasant prides himself on his miserliness, and has a reply to his neighbours' gibes and the reproaches of his wife, an honest reply since he believes it himself. They will starve if he does not save. When, after seven years of longing, his wife bears him a son, his fears are intensified. The instinct of self-preservation has taken a morbid form; the fixed idea only awaits a stroke of calamity to be the germ of madness. With unwonted terseness in the dialogue and an economy and firmness of structure



promising better things than he had yet accomplished, Carleton passes quickly over the intervening years to Connor Fardarougha's manhood. This excellent young peasant, brought up by his admirable mother, falls in love with the daughter of the wealthy Bodagh. It is a contingency that Fardarougha is not prepared for; he plays his part grotesquely, but in keeping with his fixed idea. He will not pay down a shilling now, but he is ready to leave Connor and Una everything that he has saved up.

"Why, why?" said the miser. "Are yees mad to miss what I can lave him? If you knew how much it is, you'd snap. But God help me! what am I sayin'? I'm poorer than anybody thinks. I am—I am; an' will starve among you all, if God hasn't sed it. Do you think I don't love my son as well, an' a thousand times better than you do your daughter? God alone sees how my heart's in him—in my own Connor, that never gave me a sore heart—my brave, my dutiful boy!"

He paused, and the scalding tears here ran down his shrunk and furrowed cheeks, whilst he wrung his hands, started to his feet, and looked about him like a man encompassed by dangers that threatened instant destruction.

"If you love your son so well," said John, mildly, "why do you grudge to share your wealth with him? It is but natural, and it is your duty."

"Natural!—what's natural?—to give away—is it to love him you mane? It is, it's unnatural to give it away. He's the best son—the best—what do you mane, I say? Let me alone—I could give my blood, my blood, to such a boy; you want to kill me, an' thin you'll get all; but he'll cross you, never fear—my boy will save me—he's not tired o' me—he'd give up fifty girls sooner than see a hair of his father's head injured. So do your best. While I have Connor I'm not afraid of yees. Thanks be to God that sent him," he exclaimed,—"oh, thanks be to God that sent him to comfort an' protect his father from the schames and villainy of them that 'ud bring him to starvation for their own ends!"<sup>1</sup>

But Connor is suddenly arrested for setting fire to the Bodagh's outhouses, on the information of the miscreant

<sup>1</sup> Chap. vi.

Bartle who did it himself. The shock throws Fardarougha's *Fardarougha's* brain off its hinges. He tries to take the incredible charge *agony and aberrations* on his own shoulders; he almost deludes himself into the belief that he had done the deed.

"Connor, Connor," said the old man, approaching him as he spoke, and putting his arms composedly about his neck, "Connor, my brave boy, my brave boy, it wasn't you did it. 'Twas I did it," he added, turning to the constables; "lave him, lave him with her, an' take me in his place! Who would if I would not—who ought, I say—an' I'll do it—take me; I'll go in his place."

When his wife insists that their son must be defended, Fardarougha is dumbfounded again at the monstrous fees required by counsel in a trial for life.<sup>1</sup> He haggles with the solicitor, and at last like blood from a stone an order for forty pounds is wrung from him. At that moment his reason is entirely overthrown by the news that the county treasurer has absconded with the whole of his savings; and now Fardarougha becomes the prey of the most childish illusions. Carleton had the vision and the courage to go the full length of imaginative analysis. Fardarougha's grotesque aberrations are as true as Shylock's or Lear's, and as pathetic. Agony and terror visibly perform their office on the victim's soul. The crushing blow of Connor's death-sentence reduces him to imbecility. But his wife's courage and endurance bring him back to a lucid interval of resignation; he grows almost calm.

"Honor," replied her husband, "avourneen machree, I think you'll save your husband's soul yet, undher my merciful Saviour."

"Your son, undher the same merciful God, will do it. Your heart was hard and godless, Fardarougha: and surely, if Connor's death'll be the manes of savin' his father's sowl, wouldn't it be a blessin' instead of a misfortune? Think of it in that light, Fardarougha, and turn your heart to God. As for Connor, isn't it a comfort to know, that the breath won't be out of his body till he's a bright angel in heaven?"

The old man wiped his eyes, and knelt down, having first

<sup>1</sup> Arson was then a capital offence.

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desired them to leave him. When his prayers were recited he called in Honor.

"I'm afeard," said he, "that my heart wasn't properly in them, for I couldn't prevent my mind from wandherin' to our boy."

This touching observation took the mother's affections by surprise. A tear started to her eye, but after a struggle she suppressed it.

"It's not at once you can do it, Fardarougha; so don't be cast down. Now, go to bed in the name of God, and sleep; and may the Lord in heaven support you—and support us both! for oh, it's we that want it this night of sorrow."<sup>1</sup>

*Carleton's finer heroines* Honor Fardarougha is one of the picked souls of great tragedy. She was Carleton's heart's image of his own mother, and an embodiment of religion itself as distinguished from the tenets of any sect. If poignant tragedy is ever legitimate in realistic terms that bring it home with the torture of things witnessed, such scenes as Fardarougha's anguish, or the parting of mother and son, and of the two lovers, in the convict's cell, have been seldom equalled and never surpassed. The women play their parts with profound truth to human nature. They are not singular or abnormal beings, such as Fardarougha. Honor Fardarougha and Una O'Brien, like the tragic women in *The Black Prophet* and *The Emigrants of Ahadarra*, are beautiful idealisms clothed in flesh, and none the less idealisms in being evolved from persons that Carleton knew. "I have never yet drawn a heroine except from life," he said in his preface. Una was from the girl whom he had been in love with, and, "poor cowardly dolt that I was, never had the courage to tell her so." Fardarougha also had an original, it is true; but in his case Carleton's imagination worked in a different way.

*Melo-dramatic padding* Up to this point, it is the tragedy of the delusive passions which are the scourge of struggling and suffering humanity. The rest is melodrama. Bartle, the vile informer, also had a sort of original; at least the "faint outline" was from an old schoolfellow. But Bartle's motives are left unscrutinized.

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xiii.

It is useless of Carleton to protest that he despaired of painting villainy, "that the moral artist has at present no colours black enough to do some of them justice." The reader ought to have been able to believe in his Iago. True, some hints are let fall before the act of treachery. It is clear that Bartle has the strongest reasons to hate Fardarougha. But would he have wreaked his vengeance on the son who had treated him with singular kindness and frank sympathy? A certain amount of melodrama might perhaps be condoned for the sake of the tremendous scenes to which it gives rise. But there is more of it, and more again, in Bartle's improbable scheme for abducting Una. The whole object of these incidents is to pile up the agony, and then contrive a happy ending when the tragedy is over, the play done. *Fardarougha the Miser* is a work challenging high comparisons; it would have vied with *Père Goriot* had it been left in its austere simplicity. As it is, the footnote to chapter xix., stating that it falls short of a heinous murder that actually took place in County D—n, shows how little Carleton understood that he had created a masterpiece and then mishandled and half ruined it.

In the days of the Young Ireland movement, Carleton wrote *Novels of* for the *National Library* three novels, *Parra Sashta, or the purpose History of Paddy-go-Easy and his wife Nancy* (1845), *Rody the Rover* (1845), and *Art Maguire, or the Broken Pledge* (1847), which are tracts illustrating the evils of drink, thriftlessness and shiftlessness, and Ribbonism. He was a Ribbonman himself at one time, but later made a great show of standing aloof from political movements. He always tried to make out that the secret societies were started and run by scoundrels who deceived the simple and trustful for their own vile purposes. *Valentine McClutchy, the Irish Land Agent, or Chronicles of the Castle Cumber Property* (1845), was a savage portrait of such a detested functionary, with satire of bigoted Orangemen and their New Reformation, as they called the efforts of Anglicans and Dissenters at proselytizing Roman Catholics. The eviction scene in this novel is one of his most vehement and highly coloured appeals to pity and resentment.

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"*The Black Prophet*" and "*The Emigrants of Abadarra*" *The Black Prophet, a Tale of the Irish Famine* (1847), has scenes as overwhelming as those in *Fardarougha*, and the gentle Mave Sullivan and the passionate and impulsive Sally M'Gowan are further examples of the strength of human personality in the stress of fearful events. Skinadre the usurer, a monster of hypocrisy and malignity, is one of the group showing the ugliness of evil-doing. Written during the later visitation of 1846-1847, it is a terrible picture of the famine and typhus of 1817, as terrible as Defoe's *Journal of the Plague*. Carleton's tragic force and his power of giving form and life to lovely idealisms of human character come out again in *The Emigrants of Abadarra* (1847), with its lofty embodiment of virtue and simple human dignity in the peasant girl Kathleen, finely differentiated from her livelier and sprightlier sister Hannah, and another of his admirable women, the old peasant's wife, Bridget M'Mahon.

Other novels of purpose He struck his most violent blow in the Anti-Tithe campaign in *The Tithe-Proctor* (1849), which was greeted with execrations. Carleton had a sound case, denunciation of the injustice and inhumanity of tithing and rack-renting, and a first-class illustration in the murder of the Bolands; but he ruined his plea by exaggeration and perversion of the facts.<sup>1</sup> There are natural and touching scenes, but as a whole this is violent melodrama. So too, *The Squanders of Castle Squander* (1852) must be pronounced a misguided attempt to depict in a friendly way the character and manners of the well-to-do. His genteel portraits "are almost all bad failures," says his biographer; he knew nothing about the gentry. As to Carleton's last novel, *Willy Reilly and his dear Colleen Bawn* (1855), which turned out to be his most popular and went into some fifty editions, it was indeed a bid for popularity, a romantic love-tale of the penal times founded upon a celebrated ballad, and not above the average of its kind.

Samuel Lover (1797-1868) need not be taken so seriously;

<sup>1</sup> His biographer describes this as "a vicious picture of the worst passions of the people, a rancorous description of the just war of the peasantry against tithes," in which "he has dashed on the colours with vehemence, regardless of the injury and injustice he does to his own class. . . . It reflects no credit upon its author" (O'Donoghue, ii. 119-120.).

seriousness was a thing he would have deprecated. The job *Samuel* for which he had chosen to emancipate himself from the *Lover* Dublin Stock Exchange was miniature-painting, and he did well at it and became a member and then secretary of the Royal Hibernian Academy. But Lover also wrote songs and ballads, in emulation of his friend Moore; and not only set them to music, but also sang them. One of the most popular was the *Rory O'More* which suggested his novel of the same name. Lover, says D. J. O'Donoghue, "is first and last an Irish humorist"; "like Croker," as Yeats observed, "he saw everything humorized." True, but he was a humorist in the popular sense. Brilliantly successful as a professional entertainer, he would be the same in his books, most of which were as soon dead as his public entertainments. There have been two schools of Irish novelists ever since Irish fiction began: those who understand their countrymen and draw them as nearly as possible as they see them; and those who are subjugated by the comic Irishman, and delight in the affected adjective "Hibernian." Even less than Lever could Lover free himself from the seductions of farce and pantomime. The fun and jollity which were so profitable to the man in his lifetime proved in the end an illusory endowment. His two series of *Legends and Stories of Ireland* (1831-1834) are not to be compared with the tales of the Banims, Griffin, or Carleton, though they might be with Croker's, which they outdo in skill with the brogue; they are too superficial and flimsy, too insistently facetious. But he makes good fun out of traits and types and national traditions and scraps of folklore, for instance, in the legend of King O'Toole and St Kevin, or in such a yarn as "Barny O'Reirdon the Navigator," compounding out of the sublime ignorance, craft, and effrontery of the peasant a miniature Irish *Gil Blas*.

But, on the whole, Lover's is almost a burlesque version "Handy of Irish character, manners, and history. The happy-go-lucky *Andy*" hero of his *Handy Andy* (1842), unabashed by all his blunders <sup>and</sup> and misadventures, is the creation of an Irish Theodore Hook, "*Rory O'More*", whose waggishness and practical jokes Lover naturalized in Dublin. It is a mediæval jest-book brought up to date,

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comical, not comic, buffoonery; the hero a mountebank and manikin in the expert hands of the merryandrew Samuel Lover.<sup>1</sup> The only novel of his that counts for anything, *Rory O'More* (1837), aspired to be historical fiction, a nationalist romance; and, so far as it is serious, it is an ardent patriot's view of the days of the rebellion of 1798. The anglicizers—magistrates, soldiers, collectors, spies—are scored in a series of slashing lampoons; their opposites are drawn with a wistful and engaging tenderness; and there are terrible glimpses of realities, when he can call a truce to his buffoonery. The love-tale, also, is a pleasant little peasant idyll, carefully ignoring all that might be alleged of the ferocity to which the class was prone.

*William  
Maginn*

William Maginn (1794–1842), that paladin of the punch-bowl, might have been an Irish story-teller of rank had he been more sober in the management of his literary talents than he was in his misspent life. Born at Cork, he was a thorough Irishman, whether writing, or merely drinking, quarrelling, or getting into debt, like Thackeray's image of him, Captain Shandon, in *Pendennis*. Among the best of his magazine stories—and it must be remembered that they do not pretend to be anything more—are those in Irish habiliments. "Some account of the life and writings of Morgan Odoherty" is the mock-serious memoir of a bibulous subaltern, with such appropriate sequels as "Odoherty in Vienna," "Maxims of Odoherty," and "Odoherty on Werner." Perhaps the foolish wisdom and oracular dullness of the maxims is the best exemplification of Maginn's cynical wit. He was clever at a story with a catch in it, such as his most famous piece, "A Story without a Tail." The story which is the alleged subject was told at an uproarious dinner, forgotten by all present, and when pressed the teller indignantly refuses to tell it again. "Bob Burke's Duel with Ensign Brady of the 48th" is like a burlesque expansion of some familiar anecdote of wild Irishmen in Lever's earliest novels. His other tales are more commonplace. In "The Two Butlers

<sup>1</sup> "Krans thinks Andy may have been suggested by the comical blundering of Mrs Crofton Croker's *Barney Maboney* (1832), which at her wish was published under her husband's name.

of Kilkenny," "A Vision of Purgatory," "The Legend of Knocksheogowna," and "The Legend of Knockgraston," the wit and humour are rather cheap, mocking at the recognized foibles of the stage Irish. It is Maginn's airy, almost impudent style that carried them off, in the teeth, as it were, of the reader's judgment.<sup>1</sup> The genre affected by Maginn includes also Sir Samuel Ferguson's brilliant little farce, "Father Tom and the Pope" (1838), reprinted in *Tales from Blackwood* (1910), though Sir Samuel's fiction otherwise consists of learned historical studies, mainly of the heroic period, thrown into this agreeable form.

Charles James Lever (1806-1872), born in Dublin, of English *Charles* descent though his mother was Irish, was the most prolific *Lever* of all the Irish novelists, and more than any of the rest a professional. Not that fiction was his only means of subsistence, for he practised medicine off and on before literature became more profitable. But, once he had captured an immense public that wanted to be amused, Lever went on turning out novels calculated to amuse them, altering his manner of appeal only in deference to what he opined to be the pleasure of his readers. He maintained to the very last a steady rate of production, consistently with his determination to enjoy life, and heaped up a grand total of some twoscore novels. All were about Ireland or Irish people. Lever knew them well, but did not know them profoundly. He was not of the same class as the Banims and Carleton, but of the half-English gentry and professional orders, who felt a good-natured compassion for the peasants, but deplored their sullen and savage efforts to throw off the yoke. He was not the man to look below the surface, even had he not been pledged to the task of entertaining readers obsessed with the notion that the Irishman was a comic animal. When Lever had exhausted his original fund of high spirits, jocularly, and rattling adventure, or thought the public had had enough of it, he adopted a soberer and more serious tone. But he was

<sup>1</sup> Maginn's stories were rescued from the ephemeral pages in which they first appeared in *Miscellanies, Prose and Verse*, ed. W. Montagu (1885). A more recent edition of his stories omits the most characteristic.



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not serious enough to face the tragic and almost insoluble problems underlying the downfall of families and the social and political antagonisms which he now worked into his plots, just as the Banims and Carleton had done in a different spirit. He knew what he was talking about—that is, he had the facts at his finger-ends, and no doubt had thought and talked them over with all and sundry. But his observations and interpretations and criticisms were not more penetrating than those of the average intelligent person. The genuine Lever is the reckless author of *Harry Lorrequer*, *Charles O'Malley*, and *Jack Hinton*, in which he gave free rein to the animal spirits and spontaneity of youth, and paid no heed to grim realities.

*His character and career* There was enough of the picaroon in Lever's own disposition and career to furnish out more than a handful of his happy-go-lucky and self-complacent heroes.<sup>1</sup> His life was the resultant of circumstances, which he had the wit to make profitable though not to contrive. After taking his degree at Trinity College, Dublin, he spent some time in Canada, where he amused himself with a sojourn among the Indians, from whom he had great trouble in escaping, and then went to Göttingen to work under Blumenbach and see life all over Germany. Returning to Dublin, and eventually qualifying, he showed courage and devotion to duty in a cholera epidemic at Kilrush, in County Clare, like Mary Martin, the heroine of a later novel. It was at this time that he made friends with Maxwell, and not only adopted his facile scheme of stringing together jokes and random reminiscences in *Harry Lorrequer*, which first appeared in the *Dublin University Magazine*, but also embraced Maxwell's jovial scheme of existence, and the consequent familiarity with debts and duns. This was to be the ordinary lot of many of his favourite characters: Godfrey O'Malley's make-believe death from his creditors forms an appropriate opening to his second novel. He took another post as medical officer in northern Ireland, and then went to

<sup>1</sup> In his "word of introduction" to *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* he writes, and though the facts do not fit Lever the character does: "A career of this kind, with a temperament ever ready to go with the humour of those about him, will always be sure of its meed of adventure." As to his love of jocularly, the entry "Hoaxes, Lever's," in the index to Fitzpatrick's biography will direct to plenty of his exploits in that genre.

practise in Brussels, "where and when the world seemed to present an admirable comedy," as he puts it in the preface to the same. There he wrote *Charles O'Malley* and *Jack Hinton*. Lever now accepted the editorship of the *Dublin University Magazine*, and for three years (1842-1845) was in his element, living to the full the hospitable, convivial, prodigal existence depicted so genially in most of his novels. But he was not a serious politician, and his reputation for frivolity and his easy-going temperament did not suit the fierce warfare of Tories and Young Irelanders. Under the pretext of ill health he resigned, and left Ireland, never returning except for two or three brief visits. The rest of his life was spent in such haunts of the pleasure-seeker as Carlsruhe, Baden, Venice, Rome, and Florence, and for the last fifteen years at Spezia and Trieste, where his consulships, nothing to do and a salary for doing it, were conferred as much in acknowledgment of his services to the gaiety of the world as was the honorary degree from his old university in 1871.

*The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* (1839) may be succinctly "Harry described as a farrago of "dining, drinking, riding steeple-chases, pigeon-shooting, and tandem-driving," in which the autobiographer sums up garrison life at Cork, spiced with jests and good stories, and supplemented with amorous and other adventures abroad. Many of the anecdotes and hoaxes are as old as the hills; but Lever was never at a loss to redress them in all the novelties of a hilarious fancy. He was a brilliant story-teller, and could make a small fortune out of scanty assets. Nothing could be more laughable than Harry's involuntary exploit in presenting himself on parade as Othello, having omitted to wash his face after the regimental theatricals; or his masquerading as the eminent specialist, and taking in the local practitioners by tactfully approving the treatment they have been giving their wealthy patient. He may or he may not have found the original story in *Guzman d'Alfarache*, or some imitator of that immortal jest-book; but no one had told it better.<sup>1</sup> His precedent was not quite so ancient in

<sup>1</sup> Lever's joke has points of its own. A fellow-officer is in love with an heiress. They conspire to elope, as the father objects. The lady will not meet her lover till they are lawfully wedded. Lorrequer, therefore, undertakes to appear as a venerable

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another case. It was cool of him to borrow or try to match the well-known incident of Miss Pratt's arrival in a hearse at the palatial residence of Lord Rossville, in Susan Ferrier's *Inheritance*; but there are distinct merits in the new version—Miss Betty O'Dowd in her "brand new green silk" reclining on a feather-bed in the farmer's cart, and driving eight miles under the cover of darkness to Lady Callonby's drawing-room; with her confusion later in the evening when Nicholas announces, "Miss Betty—the—the—the—" and here he looked indescribably droll—"the thing, *you know*, is at the door."<sup>1</sup>

"Charles O'Malley" If a sufficiency of such material constituted a novel, these would be of easy manufacture; and when Lever's publishers asked for another "story in the Lorrequer vein," with plenty of active service and military adventure, "the achievements of the British Army" to form the staple of the narration, he was ready for the emergency. *Charles O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon* (1841), with happily no plot worth mentioning, first recounts wild doings in Galway; then the hoaxes, shindies, and festivities of a set of students at Trinity College, who "voted morning chapels a bore, Greek lectures a humbug, examinations a farce, and pronounced the statute-book, with its attendant train of fines and punishment, an unclean thing"; and finally, the experiences of the young dragoon at the battles of the Douro, Talavera, and Fuentes d'Onoro, the storming of Ciudad Rodrigo, and the Waterloo campaign, which historical events are described with a vividness and accuracy that astonished the Duke of Wellington himself; and

senior officer and conduct her to the church. Meanwhile the aged father has sent for the regimental doctor to visit him for a consultation with the two country practitioners who have failed to do him any good. The whole officers' mess get wind of the two affairs, and Lorrequer somehow finds himself in the doctor's chaise and the doctor in Lorrequer's. Sequel, Lorrequer is in the lion's den; resolves to brazen it out, and figures with great éclat as the distinguished physician, whilst the doctor is left with an eloping young lady on his hands, for she mounts the vehicle when the alarm is given and there is nothing for it but to carry her off. As an extra complication, the brother officers seize such an opportunity to inflame the jealous suspicions of Mrs Fitzgerald, the doctor's lady, who rushes off in pursuit, and sees her innocent spouse in the very act of running off with another woman. Lever makes us lose sight of the extreme improbability of the affair, so dashing and unconcerned is the mode of relating it, and incident and dialogue so unforced and lively.

<sup>1</sup> According to W. J. Fitzpatrick (*Life of Lever*, new ed., 1884, pp. 78-79) this originated in an incident related to Lever at Kilrush.

the incidental portraits of Wellington, Picton,<sup>1</sup> and Napoleon are capitally done. But Lever's speciality was of course his whimsical Irishmen. He said: "Certain traits of my acquaintances found themselves embodied in some of the characters"<sup>1</sup>; the most prominent, Major Monsoon, who seems to have a tincture of both Falstaff and Major Dalgetty, was drawn "with very little aid from fancy." Lever had apparently secured a vested interest in the original worthy's life and adventures. At any rate, he purchased the story of his robbing his own convoy of the royal sherry for the sum of "five naps." The comic serving-man, Mickey Free, had, he said, "not one, but one thousand types"; and the tomboy, Baby Blake, came of a long line of madcaps, though a definite original has been identified. The election dinner, when Charles finds that he has returned thanks for the toast meant for the rival candidate, the bravado of the fox-hunt and the desperate cross-country race with the English captain, the hospitable offer to shoot one of the defaulting tenants in order to provide a rousing wake for the English visitor, and the duel with the bloodthirsty Bodkin, after whose fall O'Malley and his sapient uncle, Count Considine, escape by the skin of their teeth in a sailing skiff on the Shannon from being lynched by the vengeful tenants, are first-rate Lever. He is second-rate with his regulation heroines, such as the Oriana-like sportswoman, Lucy Dashwood, who faints when sentiment demands it, or the diabolical duellist, with a vest of chain-mail next the skin, who dies like Bois-Guilbert.

Some tremendous conflict of the spirit within had snapped the chords of life, and the strong man had perished in his agony.

He is worse than second-rate in his cheerful indifference to Irish neglect and squalor and his oblivion of much that was still more tragic. And, as Poe censoriously remarked, Lever scorns mere probability, often repeats himself, and is slovenly both in the conduct of his story and even in his English.<sup>2</sup>

*Jack Hinton the Guardsman* (1844) is another ragout of what

<sup>1</sup> This propensity of his got him into many embarrassing situations, threats of duels, etc., with persons who thought themselves caricatured.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, ed. R. H. Stoddard, vi. 505-519.

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"Jack  
Hinton"

Poe called "devilled kidneys"<sup>1</sup>; but this time the *chef* is an English officer sent to Ireland with dispatches for the Lord-Lieutenant, who finds this nobleman, the Duke of Grafton, carousing in the midst of "austere churchmen, erudite chief justices, profound politicians, privy councillors, military officers of high rank and standing . . . all mixed up together into one strange medley, apparently bent on throwing an air of ridicule over the graver business of life, and laughing alike at themselves and the world." Lever admits again that for many of his characters he "had not to call upon imagination." His sporting and deep-drinking priest, Father Tom Loftus, was sketched from the Rev. Michael Comyns of Kilkee; and Jack's esquire, Corny Delaney, that jovial beggar, Tipperary Joe, and the wealthy upstarts, Mr and Mrs Paul Rooney, who entertain the Viceroy at the great ball where Corny gets knighted by mistake, are all drawn from originals who are on record.<sup>2</sup>

"Tom  
Burke"

*Tom Burke of Ours* (1844) is about another O'Malley, who goes to France, and serves under the First Consul and then the Emperor. Napoleon is, of course, very prominent, in the exciting episodes of the Austerlitz and Jena campaigns; the Parisian scenes are no less stirring, and are done by one who always felt himself at home with the French. Darby the Blast is the usual low-comedy foil to the Irish hero. In *Arthur O'Leary*, of the same year, Lever served up his own adventures in Canada and during his student days at Göttingen.

A change  
of tone

But he thought it prudent to change his note, after so many careless chronicles of drinking, joking, and fighting. The fun had been too rich; readers would tire of characters who were always carousing.<sup>3</sup> *St Patrick's Eve* (1845), sug-

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vi. 512.

<sup>2</sup> Father Comyns was hurt by his caricature by Phiz, not by Lever's portrait. The original of Tipperary Joe was one of those who claimed "ready money down" for having been put in a book (Fitzpatrick, 164).

<sup>3</sup> Krans will have it that the graver tone shows itself in *Tom Burke* (1844), *Roland Casbel* (1850) representing "another decided step in the direction of gravity and seriousness." He thinks that Thackeray's "Phil Fogarty, by Harry Rollicker," was "in part responsible for the change" (Krans, 290). But "Phil Fogarty," a skit on Lever's first three novels, did not appear with the rest of the "Prize Novelists" in *Punch* till the summer of 1847. It was not *Tom Burke*, but *St Patrick's Eve*, *The O'Donoghue*, and still more unmistakably *Roland Casbel*, that exhibit an assumption

gested by *The Chimes* of Dickens, was also composed of autobiographical material; but it was the terrible visitation of cholera which he himself had witnessed at close quarters in 1832 that gave the story its tragic hue, and he knew enough of the misery of the peasant, ground down by middlemen and apathetic landlords, to paint a touching picture. An example followed the same year of this more thoughtful treatment of the economic plight of a land in which many of the ancient houses which had maintained feudal relations with their tenantry were collapsing under the pressure of extravagance and debt, and English landlords who did not understand the peasants were introducing benevolent but impractical schemes for bettering their lot. In *The O'Donoghue* (1845) the date is 1796, when Hoche was fitting out his expedition to Bantry Bay, and the scene Kerry, new surroundings for Lever, who had hitherto laid his Irish stories north of the Shannon. The selfish old chief of the O'Donoghues, brooding in his ruined tower over the lost glories of his house; the moody son, living like a peasant, and tempted and betrayed by United Irishmen, who are represented as making profit out of conspiracy; a rich Englishman, striving to ameliorate the condition of the peasants, whose nature he cannot fathom and who regard his efforts with suspicion: these stand for the intractable historic factors of the situation, whilst Lanty Lawler, the horse-coper, and pretty Kate O'Donoghue furnish interests more characteristic of Lever. He studied the region and read up the history; the problem is stated in graphic and picturesque terms; but Lever has no solution to offer, and for that matter no valid definition of the issues. It is romance, not truth; sentiment, not hard sense; that he palms off on the reader, as in the rest of what he meant to be more serious novels.

A contrast to the morose O'Donoghue is the chivalrous and debonair Knight of Gwynne, in the novel of that name of gravity and more thoughtfulness. *Roland Casbel* also bears witness to Lever's resentment of Thackeray's ridicule, the "publisher's man of all work," Elias Howle, "ready for everything, from statistics to satire," being recognized by everyone, including the victim, as a lampoon on Thackeray.

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"*The Knight of Gwynne*," "Roland Cashel," etc. (1847), who preserves the social graces of the past, is on the best of terms with his tenants, and faces adversity with courage and dignity. Castlereagh comes into the story, as a cynical politician openly bargaining for votes at the time of the Union. But the most memorable character is the undisguised portrait of Sir Jonah Barrington's Beauchamp Bagenal, in Bagenal Daly.<sup>1</sup> *Roland Cashel* (1850) deals with landlordism at a later era. Incidentally it has a stinging sketch of Archbishop Whateley, in the Dean of Drumcondra, not to mention the flick at Thackeray as a ripost to "Phil Fogarty." In the main, however, this is only a novel of love adventure and legal chicane, Roland, the young soldier of fortune from Columbia, being nearly done out of his estate by an accomplished villain. Lever also has some heavy words in season on the evils of the gaming-tables at Baden. *The Daltons, or Three Roads in Life* (1852), happens to be his longest novel, but is not otherwise distinguished. It was written on the Continent, and takes its worthless absentee and his family to Germany and Italy, plunging them into the political, military, and religious disturbances of the forties. Then, in *The Dodd Family Abroad* (1854), Lever regaled his readers with the ridiculous prejudices and false expectations of a set of Anglo-Irish people travelling on the Continent, keeping fairly near the epistolary scheme of *Humphry Clinker*, but hardly approaching Smollett in wit and ripe humour.

"*Con Cregan*" Most of Lever's novels, even the more discursive social studies, count a picaroon or two, a political adventurer, and soldier of fortune, or a too enterprising financier, in their motley retinue. In *Con Cregan, the Irish Gil Blas* (1854), he relapsed completely into this ingrained weakness for the picaresque. He deliberately published the book anonymously, having written it concurrently with *The Daltons* in an odd freak of rivalry with himself. *The Daltons* he wrote in the morning, *Con Cregan* was never begun till near midnight, he says in the preface. "No character of *The Daltons* ever crossed my mind after nightfall, nor was there a trace of

<sup>1</sup> See Sir Jonah Barrington's *Recollections* (1914) and W. J. O'Neil Daunt's *Eighty-five Years of Irish History* (1888), *passim*.

*Con Cregan* in my head at my breakfast next morning." The opening chapters are as good as Lever ever wrote. Con enters Trinity College clandestinely as servant to a young student met on the road, somewhere in the Irish home counties. His scapegrace father has left him under the stigma of being an informer's son. The story of the hoary reprobate's trick, when, bribed to impersonate an old landowner who has died intestate, he writes out a will and takes the precaution to leave two acres to himself, is another of Lever's finds that bear retelling.<sup>1</sup> Con, by his resource and presence of mind, becomes the instrument of saving a much bigger rogue, Sir Dudley Boughton, from being robbed and probably murdered, and thus gets his start on a career of adventures, each more fearful than the last and mostly ending in Con's discomfiture and temporary ruin, until in a hair-raising climax in the wilds of Mexico and Texas he possesses himself of a fabulous treasure, which enables him to attain the social eminence on the European continent which he had always coveted. Con is more worthy of the creator of Baron Munchausen than of Le Sage.

Lever wanted to paint another Irish gentleman of the old *More* school in *Sir Jasper Carew, his Life and Experiences* (1855), which likewise appeared anonymously. He recaptured some of his ancient liveliness in sketching the harum-scarum social life and the turbulent politics of the early days of the Dublin Parliament. But how much he was at the mercy of the book market is evidenced by the fact that he had to wind up the story hurriedly because his publisher, McGlashan, said "no" to his more elaborate finish.<sup>2</sup> Adventurers, if not outright picaroons, are the heroes or the deponents in various other novels. *Davenport Dunn, the Man of our Day* (1859), is the history of a financial rogue, and of a sporting blackleg who plays second fiddle in his colossal frauds. It is much the same with *One of Them* (1861) and *Tony Butler* (1865), both exploiting Lever's knowledge of diplomatic life. *Maurice*

<sup>1</sup> F. N. Chandler traces it to Marco Cademosto da Lodi and Granucci (see *The Literature of Roguery*, ii. 395 n.).

<sup>2</sup> Fitzpatrick, 286-287. James McGlashan was the managing director of Messrs Curry & Co., who bought the *Dublin University Magazine* (in which a number of Lever's novels appeared serially) six months after it started, in 1833.



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*Tiernay* (1861) gives the career of a Jacobite exile, in Paris during the Terror, in Ireland with Humbert's expedition, and with Napoleon on the Austrian campaigns, which are recounted with Lever's usual address in military affairs. *Sir Brooke Fosbrooke* (1866), which he said "is the most carefully written of my works," all but repeated the success of *Charles O'Malley*. Happily he did not definitely change his style after the experiment in *The Fortunes of Glencore* (1857), which he wrote to satisfy himself that his genius really lay "in the delineation of character and the unravelment of that tangled skein that makes up human motives," which, on the contrary, were his weakest points.

"*The Martins of Cro' Martin*" A fair test of Lever's pretensions in his more serious fiction is to see how he handles that favourite theme of his own and of Irish novels by other hands, a great house on the road to ruin. *The Martins of Cro' Martin* (1856) is his *Castle Rackrent*. It is the last chapter, much altered, in the history of the Martins of Ballinahinch, who came to grief after the famine; and it was rather a liberty on Lever's part to take such a well-known case and hardly trouble to disguise it. Lordly expenditure, unawareness that the age of feudalism was dead, and a lofty unconcern for the human rights of their tenants, were undermining the fabric of the Martins' little empire in Connemara. The decisive push comes from the Relief Bill of 1829; religious emancipation has not given the franchise to the masses; but it has made them restive, and they suddenly awake to their independence. When Martin puts in a nominee for the borough of Oughterard, the burgesses elect their own man; whereupon Martin's wife, an imperious aristocrat, insists on quitting Cro' Martin—a literal replica of the stately Ballinahinch. They settle on the Continent, and incidentally Lever makes them eye-witnesses of the Three Days of 1830. Meanwhile the estates go from bad to worse. Spendthrift absenteeism and disaffected tenants bring them face to face with beggary. But, instead of pursuing events to the inevitable and actual conclusion, Lever temporizes, or rather romanticizes, brings a crowd of droll characters on the stage, complicates with side-issues, and by hook or by crook secures

a comfortable ending. The fictitious Martins do not crash completely. That would be too trying for him and his tender-hearted readers, some of whom would have been hurt in their political feelings. So when Martin dies, his worthless son is hastily reformed, and the house of Cro' Martin, somewhat reduced in wealth and prestige but still apparently far from ruin, is restored.

Like some of Miss Edgeworth's people, the new proprietor *A contrast to* is in the clutches of a Jew. But, very improbably, it transpires *Miss Edgeworth* that Captain Martin's twin brother is really the elder, and consequently is the legal heir. The Jew is checkmated; he has bought a rotten title. All is well with the Martins after all. Lever calls it a novel of purpose, and social and economic conditions are canvassed from various points of view. But it has developed into a full-dress society novel, with a farcical peasant background, and threads of interest so many as to be confounding. Maria Edgeworth was more business-like. She may have been an outsider; but what she did see of the peasants and the lords of the soil she saw with clear eyes, recorded honestly, and interpreted with logical downrightness. Lever, even when he has undertaken to state a typical case, shrinks from the logical conclusion, verified by the facts.<sup>1</sup>

The rest of Lever's supposedly serious novels are similar "Luttrell mixtures of domestic realism, romance, and drollery. *Barrington of Arran,*" (1862) is such a drama of family life in County Kilkenny, with *etc.* a fire-eating major, a country doctor, and a young man in disgrace and afterwards rehabilitated who was drawn from Lever's own son. Domestic and legal complications in a family of rich parvenus in County Derry furnish serio-comedy

<sup>1</sup> The finer of the two heroines is Mary Martin, namesake of the heiress to the Ballinahinch estates, and up to a certain point her facsimile. Miss Edgeworth paid an unpremeditated visit to the "Princess of Connemara" in 1833, and was amazed at the regal splendour and luxury in which the family lived in their remote world. But the real Mary Letitia Martin (1815-1850) astonished her visitor still more by her learning and accomplishments; whereas Lever's Mary Martin, though she too rules like a queen, is only half educated. She eventually dies of exposure in ministering to the peasants during an epidemic of cholera. Her pluck and disregard of the conventions antagonize all the respectable mediocrities and make her the idol of friends and discerning enemies. The Mary Martin of fact lost her vast estates a few years later, married a cousin as poor as herself, sailed to America in an emigrant ship in a state bordering upon destitution, and died soon after landing. She told the tale of her misfortunes broadly in her romance, *Julia Howard* (1850).

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in *The Bramleights of Bishop's Folly* (1868). *Luttrell of Arran* (1865) is a bizarre combination in which the romantic predominates. Lever can here be seen making feverish efforts at originality, but only achieving the improbable. Luttrell is the regular impoverished proprietor, with nothing but the sterile Arans remaining of estates that date from the thirteenth century. He lives on Inishmore like a hermit, lets his motherless boy go off with a buccaneering Yankee, and is succeeded by one of those heroic Irish girls whom Lever knew how to paint. After breathless vicissitudes the girl and the boy are wedded. It is all as meaningless as it is unreal. *A Day's Ride, a Life's Romance* (1863), recounts the quixotic gestes of a Dublin apothecary's son, a very banal nincompoop. More Leveresque is *Lord Kilgobbin, a Tale of Ireland in our Time* (1872), in which an unrecognized viscount of James II, living in his dilapidated mansion or farmhouse yclept castle, is drawn with his son and daughter into the public affairs of Gladstone and Bright's era, in a too-miscellaneous narrative, which shows signs of borrowing from both Disraeli and Trollope. Again, it is all very inconsequent. But the old Tory, and whilom editor of the *Dublin University Magazine*, has moved a long way to the left when he marries his high-spirited Greek princess to the Fenian, and permits Betty O'Shea to assert, when she is dying and has lost her "sustained virulence," relapsing "into half-mildness at moments":

"People tell you that you can't take your money with you into the next world, Mat Kearney, and a greater lie was never uttered. Thanks to the laws of England, and the Court of Equity in particular, it's the very thing you can do! Ay, and you can provide, besides, that everybody but the people who had a right to it shall have a share."

Lord Kilgobbin is one of Lever's middle-aged Irish gentlemen, such as Count Considine and Godfrey O'Malley, in his second novel, Bagenal Daly, in *The Knight of Gwynne*, and Sir Brooke Fosbrooke, who have been praised for their lifelikeness, bonhomie, and wisdom, allied with humour.<sup>1</sup> They are

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Krans, 219-220.

pleasing figures; but, again, Lever's want of depth and seriousness, even in his comedy, plainly appears when they are compared with such fair parallels as Miss Edgeworth's Count O'Halloran or Sir Terence O'Fay, in *The Absentee*, or King Corny or Sir Ulick O'Shane, in *Ormond*. Miss Edgeworth holds her own at the head of the Irish novelists, in spite of her lack of Irish blood.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL NOVELISTS AFTER SCOTT

*The  
con-  
temporary  
interest  
in  
history* BEFORE Scott died, in 1832, G. P. R. James, Fenimore Cooper, Bulwer, Captain Marryat, and such modest imitators as Mrs Bray, were already following in his footsteps; Balzac had written *Les Chouans*, De Vigny *Cinq-Mars*, and Victor Hugo *Notre-Dame de Paris*. At times, half the annual output of fiction consisted of historical novels or historical romances, all modelled on the Waverleys, except such as made a virtue of preferring the Shakespearian example, and dramatizing great and famous episodes with historical personages as the protagonists. Historical fiction was bound to be a favourite with writers and readers now that such a satisfactory pattern was available. For this was an age deeply interested in history. Hume, Gibbon, and Robertson had been followed by Milman, Roscoe, Sharon Turner, Hallam, Thirlwall, and Lingard, and these were succeeded by Carlyle and Macaulay, Kinglake and Froude, men of letters as well as scholars, with such compeers in America as Washington Irving, Prescott, and Motley. On the Continent, Hegel, Ranke, Niebuhr, and Mommsen were presently to establish the modern school of critical research. It was not only the novelists that affected historical themes, the poets followed suit. Scott's lays had preceded his novels, and this initiative or that of the novels was followed by Byron in several of his metrical tales and in his historical dramas, by Milman and later by Sir Henry Taylor in their plays, by Southey's ambitious historical epics, Moore's *Lalla Rookh* and *The Epicurean*,<sup>1</sup> and Lockhart's Spanish ballads, to cite but a few. Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* owed nothing to Scott, but bear like witness to the general preoccupation with history. It was the same in America; it was the same

<sup>1</sup> Numbered among his poetical works—e.g. in Longman's collected edition.

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on the Continent, as Victor Hugo and Dumas testify, in plays as well as in novels, to mention only the chief among many.

But the effect of Scott's impetus can be traced also in more *Odd* miscellaneous and nondescript sorts of historical fiction or *sorts of* fictitious history. Thomas Hope, the traveller and con-<sup>"feigned history"</sup>noisseur, and Morier the diplomatist, instead of putting all their experiences into books of travel or historical surveys, fashioned a kind of "feigned history," to apply Bacon's phrase for poesy to a genre for which there is no apter name. Trelawny produced a feigned autobiography, the author of *Pandurang Hari* feigned memoirs; Eliot Warburton told the story of the projector William Paterson in his *Darien, or the Merchant Prince* (1851). Marryat's shipmate Edward Howard, in *Sir Henry Morgan the Buccaneer* (1842), and G. W. Thornbury, in *The Buccaneers, or Monarchs of the Main* (1855), recounted facts in the colourful guise of fiction; and Colonel Meadows Taylor, officer to the Nizam, in his *Confessions of a Thug* (1839), wrote in the form of a novel what was history at least in substance. Their examples have been followed frequently enough down to the present day. How is such a story as the Rev. Richard Cobbold's *Margaret Catchpole* (1845) to be designated, when scarcely anything but the conversations are the author's invention?

The prestige enjoyed by historical fiction had something *The* to do with the more than tolerant reception accorded, a little <sup>"instruc-  
tive"</sup> later on, to Samuel Warren's revelations of a medical man's experiences, to the slapdash realism of Theodore Hook's <sup>element</sup> sayings and doings of the obscure middle classes, and even <sup>in</sup> to what was presumed to be actual truth in the humorous sketches of Frank Smedley, Albert Smith, Douglas Jerrold, and others, including that great chronicler of sporting life, R. S. Surtees. There was a prevalent idea, partly due to the friendly relations between fiction and history, but originating in a desire on the part of readers as well as writers to find a respectable pretext for what others branded as a frivolous pastime, that the true underlying object of fiction was to show how other people lived. The idea was often endorsed by reviewers, eager to approve seriousness and decry triviality.

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Historical fiction was commended for being instructive, and a similar utilitarian bias was ready to perceive good in anything that could teach us more about the world we live in and the people who live in it.<sup>1</sup> Historical and other novelists were regularly taken to task by the critics for lapses which simply meant that they had failed to supply as much accurate information as they might, as if fiction was to be counted among the sources of useful knowledge. It did not occur to such censors that the finest fiction of all, in whatever form, epic, play, or novel, was that which dealt powerfully and profoundly with the life that everyone knows, or with stories and characters that are the common heritage, and thus familiar to everyone. Fiction is a mirror rather than a spyglass. Those who sought in a novel, or pretended to seek, simply more knowledge of the world were not likely to find the mental and spiritual nourishment which fiction, like any other art, supplies to those having imagination and insight.

*Novels  
treating  
of little-  
known  
classes,  
races,  
etc.*

Defoe in the infancy of the novel had exploited the contemporary rage for facts, and there was some parallel between that period and this; though it might seem strange that after Fielding, Richardson, and Sterne, in the age of Scott and Jane Austen, there should be a public still ready to greet this element in fiction with a cheer. At all events, the conviction was widespread and ineradicable that accurate recording of the manners and characters and social conditions of classes and occupations which were little known to the rest of the world had its part in the diffusion of knowledge, and thus some good might come even out of a circulating library. Any variety, any curious aspect, of human existence cried out for its novelist, whose business was to give a veracious report, introduce it with all its singularities, likenesses and unlikenesses to the normal and familiar, to readers avid to learn not about themselves but about those as different from themselves as possible. Such an idea was warrant enough for fictitious

<sup>1</sup> Professor Myron T. Brightfield (*Theodore Hook and his Novels*, 1928, p. 296 n.) gives a long list of novels with such titles as *Tales of Truth* (1800), *A Picture from Life* (1804), *Characteristic Incidents drawn from Real Life* (1810), *Tales of Real Life* (1813), *Life, Smooth and Rough, as it Runs* (1815), *No Fiction* (1819), *Tales founded upon Facts* (1820).

## HISTORICAL NOVELISTS AFTER SCOTT 65

history inspired with little of Scott's profound humanity, and presently gave encouragement and approval to novelists who constituted themselves showmen to sections of the community which they thought had been neglected. Naturally, the life of strange races and the careers of extraordinary individuals were very fertile subjects. It has already been noted how much the native Irish novelists relied upon their appeal as illustrators of manners and customs and sentiments strange and astonishing to the English. Such an attitude gave a hearty welcome to Hope, Morier, Trelawny, and other painters of the outlandish and bizarre, not more for their literary merits than for their qualifications as first-hand authorities on subjects far from the beaten track. A great deal of Fenimore Cooper's appeal to the civilized world lay in his graphic and well-informed description of the primitive nature, customs, and superstitions of his redskins, an appeal in which the romantic charm was counterweighted by his pedantic zeal for ethnological and even philological information. Scott consigned all that to his introductions and notes.

It is significant that Hope, Trelawny, Hockley, W. D. Arnold, *Hope's* and Richard Cobbold were each men of one novel, and were "*Anas-*  
*tastus*" best known in other ways than as novelists; the novel was a parergon, just such a digression from their main work as the *Eöthen* of Kinglake. Morier wrote several other novels after the brilliant success of *Hajji Baba*; but he too was first of all the traveller and diplomatist, who took it into his head to put some of his experience and reflections into a novel. Thomas Hope (c. 1770-1831), who was a year older than Scott and died a year before him, was a great collector of works of art, who had travelled widely in the eastern hemisphere, particularly in the countries ruled by the Turk, and enjoyed a high reputation for his knowledge and taste in architecture and sculpture, costume ancient and modern, and the decorative crafts, especially of household furniture. Sydney Smith was astonished at his writing a novel, and exclaimed: "Is this the man of chairs and tables—the gentleman of sphinxes—the Œdipus of coalboxes—he who meditates on muffineers and



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planned pokers?"<sup>1</sup> A thinker in his own peculiar way, as Sydney Smith admits, Hope was opinionated and fond of laying down the law,<sup>2</sup> among his guests at Deepdene as in his singular novel. *Anastasius, or Memoirs of a Greek, written at the close of the eighteenth century*, appeared anonymously in 1819, the same year as the first two cantos of *Don Juan*. Hope owed to Byron, perhaps, his most immediate stimulus; Byron, indeed, was supposed by some to be the author; but *Gil Blas* was his model, though his titular hero is too much of a villain to square exactly with the established picaresque character, even if the haps and hazards of his life answered well enough.

*The  
story*

It is the time of Catherine the Great's war with the Turks, a sanguinary episode of history still to be treated in *Don Juan*,<sup>3</sup> and the long narrative opens with the Russian defeat of the Turkish navy off Chios, where Anastasius was born in 1770. Anastasius is heartless beyond the common measure, certainly of picaros; he is more like Byron's Giaour, Alp, or Conrad, than the light-hearted Juan, and like them has his prototype in Moore's Zeluco.<sup>4</sup> He holds his own in a heartless, profligate, and barbarous world, when the name of Turk was synonymous with faithlessness and cruelty. He described himself as "a being of mere instinct, a child over which the cravings of the sense still reigned uncontrolled," acknowledging no subjection save to superior strength, and by nature hating the shackles of social institutions. Anastasius is clever enough to prosper as secretary to a Greek dragoman at Constantinople; and when he is disgraced for a scandalous intrigue begins his multifarious changes of estate as understrapper to a quack. He is flung into a bagnio, narrowly escapes a visitation of plague, and presently finds himself at Cairo during the ascendancy of the mamelukes, with whom he becomes a leader. He loves fighting, though prone to brood, even on the battlefield, over

<sup>1</sup> Review of *Anastasius* (*Edinburgh Review*, 1821), reprinted in *The Works of Sydney Smith*, 308).

<sup>2</sup> He wrote, besides his large treatises on costume, furniture, architecture, etc., an unorthodox *Essay on the Origin and Prospects of Man* (3 vols., 1831).

<sup>3</sup> Viz., in cantos vii.-ix.

<sup>4</sup> See Volume V. 229-231. "Byron told Lady Blessington (*Conversations*, p. 64) that he wept bitterly, on reading *Anastasius*, first because he had not written the book, and then because Hope had" (*Works of Byron*, ed. Lord Ernle, *Letters and Journals*, v. 58 n.).

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the vicissitudes of fate and the enormities even one feeble hand can perpetrate armed with modern instruments of destruction. It is this turn for self-analysis and self-torture which is the distinction of this strange autobiography. The worldly-wise counsel which Anastasius gives or receives is cynical and acute, and in the picaresque tradition; his deeper reflections are in the manner of the despairing Zeluco; there is pathos even in his self-contempt, a tragic glimpse of higher things in his remorse. Though he relates his exploits in the field, at Court, and in the women's quarters, with all the gusto of the moment, he quickly sees the horror of his deeds, as when in a sudden quarrel he has stabbed his sworn friend Anagnosti, and conscience cries:

"To the last day of thy life, the wound inflicted by thee on Anagnosti shall continue to fester in thine own distracted bosom: it shall remain fresh and green when his mouldering remains have fallen into dust; it shall follow thee beyond the grave; it shall make thee dread to meet thy friend even in the regions of eternal bliss,—if it should not eternally close against thee their inexorable doors." <sup>1</sup>

Of the other friend, the magnanimous Spiridion, who strives in vain to reform him, he can sincerely aver—

That, had the irrevocable decrees of fate destined one of us only to be accepted among the host of heaven, I verily believe he would, with all his ardour for excellence, have submitted to stoop to the bitter fruits of sin, in order that Anastasius might not be the one discarded from the realms of bliss eternal! <sup>2</sup>

Most interesting, however, as a train of thought that still gives comfort to some who have pursued it a century later, is the meditation on good and evil, and their place in a universe divinely ordained. By experience of the moral opposites man develops his soul.

At this somewhat disheartening period of my reasoning, a new light flashed suddenly upon me. It struck my sublime intellect that, if Omnipotence had not merely permitted, but had itself positively ordained, on this transient globe of wailing,

<sup>1</sup> i. 212.

<sup>2</sup> ii. 141.

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good still to be mixed with evil, production with destruction, knowledge with error, and happiness with suffering, this ordination was only a more palpable effect of Almighty goodness than any other apparently more desirable disposition could have been:—that so far from this temporary conflict of interests and passions being decreed for the cruel purpose of punishing the man, who yields to temptations that need not have assailed him, it was in reality only with the benevolent design of teaching creatures all destined for eternal felicity, through dint of a certain portion of previous suffering, that which a state perfect from the beginning could not have taught,—the eternal difference between evil and good, ignorance and knowledge, misery and happiness; in order that they might thus, through the unceasing comparison between the two, more forcibly feel, when attained, the ineffable bliss of that new existence where good is to be freed from evil, and joy to reign unmixed with the alloy of pain.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Anastasius repulses Spiridion too, who had braved much to save the rescuer of his own life. Out of his natural bent to suspicion and inability to believe in goodness, he outrages Euphrosyne, whose heart he has gained. She dies in misery, leaving a child, whom he at length discovers only to lose again irrevocably. He dies a defeated man at thirty-five.

Hope had a graphic pen; and his design, to present a character and a mental posture which were the natural outcome of such a time and such surroundings, together with his wide knowledge and his imaginative and philosophical grasp, resulted in a striking historical novel, radically different from Scott's. Sydney Smith was so impressed by his descriptive force that twice in the one review he compares Hope to Tacitus. Lytton makes one of his characters say: "It is a great misfortune for Hope that—

‘To *learning* he narrowed his mind,  
And gave up to the *East* what was meant for mankind.’

One often loses, in admiration at the knowledge of peculiar costume, the deference one would have paid to the masterly grasp of universal character.”<sup>2</sup>

History comes only indirectly, and seen distortedly through

<sup>1</sup> ii. 182-183.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent, in *Pelbam*, lii.

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Persian eyes, into *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* Morier's (1824) by James Justinian Morier; but this is at least as "Hajji knowledgeable a presentment of a strange race as was the *Baba*" recent novel of Thomas Hope. Anastasius, indeed, was too much a reflex of his author's philosophical cogitations to be thoroughly true to time, place, and people. Morier, keeping more faithfully to the precedent of *Gil Blas*, managed to embody the Persian genius in the Spanish mould without doing violence to either. *Hajji Baba* is pure comedy; the satire, of which there is plenty, is good-humoured laughter. And it is not merely the peculiar racial humour of the Orient; it is the same universal comedy of human follies, errors, and infirmities as fills so much space in the *Arabian Nights*, a veritable treasury of the picaresque. But the world of the *Arabian Nights* is a fantastic world; this is reality. Morier (1780-1849) was born at Smyrna, son of the consul-general to the Levant Company, afterwards British consul at Constantinople. He entered the diplomatic service, became secretary of legation at Teheran, and published an account of his travels in the East, in *A Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople, in the years 1808 and 1809, in which is included some account of the proceedings of his Majesty's mission . . . to the Court of the King of Persia* (1812). After acting as British representative to the Shah (1810-1815), he wrote another book, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, between the years 1810 and 1816 . . . with an account of the proceedings of his Majesty's embassy* (1818). Readable as these formal records were, the playful by-product is the only work that has lived, and that is likely to have a long life still.

As the lad was born while his parents were on their way to Hajji's tomb of Hosein, at Kerbelah, he is solemnly nicknamed *story* Hajji, or the pilgrim, a title which he afterwards uses on occasion with the air of a saint. Hajji's father is a celebrated barber at Ispahan, and the son becomes an expert at the same profession. But a Bagdad merchant instils the lust for travel, and takes him on a journey to Meshed. The caravan is attacked by Turcomans, and Hajji is captured. His services with the

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razor, however, are accepted in lieu of ransom; he throws in his lot with the bandits, and receives the appointment of body barber to the chief. After taking part in a raid on his native city, he escapes from the freebooters, only to fall from the frying-pan into the fire. In his distress, he becomes a water-carrier, then an itinerant vendor of smoke, a story-telling dervish, a servant to the king's physician, and later on an executioner. He falls in love with the fair Zeenab, inmate of the physician's harem; but she is given as a present to the Shah, and Hajji finds himself a rival to that potentate. The intrigue ends in the death of Zeenab, and the unfortunate Hajji, as sub-lieutenant to the chief executioner, has to witness the tragedy and help to bury the corpse. The episode is none the less pathetic in that Hajji must bottle up his anguish, for fear of the Shah's vengeance; but his sufferings are not envenomed, like the remorse of Anastasius, by the pangs of self-analysis.

To escape the wrath of the King of Kings, Hajji flees to a sanctuary, and by pious observances gains a character for holiness which secures the royal pardon when the Shah visits the shrine. Returning to Ispahan in time to close the eyes of his dying father, he cannot discover the property to which he is heir, and commences a fresh series of hand-to-mouth rôles, as lawyer's scribe, secretary to a bureau for the supply of temporary wives, the confidential servant of a roguish mullah; then, after absconding with the spoils of a rich man whom he finds dead in a bath, he is apprehended for the murder, escapes again, and sets up as a merchant, going with a caravan to Constantinople. Here is the scene of his most daring impersonation. Passing himself off as a descendant of the Prophet, he obtains the hand of a wealthy widow, and blossoms out as an aga. But his glory is short-lived. He quarrels with his wife, and cast off by her sees the wide world before him once more. Happily the Persian ambassador is pleased with his story, and tells him to write a history of Europe suited to the palate of the Shah; and, after an opportune exhibition of his talent for diplomacy, Hajji is commissioned to go with an embassy to England, as chief secretary to the

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titular ambassador, Mirza Firouz.<sup>1</sup> When next he visits his native city it is as a great man, "Mirza Hajji Baba, the Shah's deputy."

Hajji's narrative, of which this is but a ragged outline, is embellished with inset stories and large comic episodes, in true Oriental fashion. There is the history of Dervish Sefer, who tells Hajji:

"Ah, my friend, little do you know of dervishes, and still less of humankind. It is not great learning that is required to make a dervish: assurance is the first ingredient. With one-fiftieth part of the accomplishments that you have mentioned, and with only a common share of effrontery, I promise you that you may command not only the purses but the lives of your hearers. By impudence I have been a prophet, by impudence I have wrought miracles, by impudence I have restored the dying to health—by impudence, in short, I lead a life of great ease and am feared and respected by those who, like you, do not know what dervishes are."

The worldly wisdom of the Caliph Haroun al-Raschid is *Satirical* illustrated by his judgment upon the barber who cheated the *irony* woodcutter of his wooden pack-saddle, by offering him a price "for all the wood that was upon the ass." The woodcutter in revenge asks the barber's price for shaving himself and his companion, and when his own beard has been shaved presents his companion, the ass. When the pair are brought before the Commander of the Faithful, justice is done: "the barber was obliged to prepare a great quantity of soap, to lather the beast from head to foot, and to shave him in the presence of the caliph and the whole Court," the poor woodcutter being dismissed with a present of money. Later on, after he has lost Zeenab, Hajji finds himself with the Persian troops on an expedition against the Russians. His commanding officer,

<sup>1</sup> This gives the date, 1809-1810, if, as Scott supposes in his appreciation (Everyman ed., viii.), Mirza Firouz is to be identified with Abou Taleb, Persian envoy to the Court of George III. Scott gives a letter, said to have been actually addressed to Morier by the Persian minister ridiculed under the name of Mirza Firouz: "English gentleman say, *Hadji Baba* very clever book, but I think not clever at all—very foolish book. You must not be angry with me, sir. I your old friend, sir. God know, I your very good friend to you, sir. But now you must write other book, and praise Persian peoples very much. I swear very much to the king you never write *Hadji Baba*."

the chief executioner, is filled with indignation at the barbarity of some Russian skirmishers, who have taken a safe position and persist in shooting down his men.

Calling away his troops, and retreating himself at a quick pace, he exclaimed: "Curses be on their beards! Curse their fathers, mothers, their ancestry, and posterity! Whoever fought after this fashion? Killing, killing, as if we were so many hogs. See, see, what animals they are! They will not run away do all you can to them. They are worse than brutes:—brutes have feeling—they have none. O Allah, Allah, if there was no dying in the case, how the Persians would fight!"

Perhaps the unconscious irony of the last remark is a little too incredible. But there is nothing to object to in the vizier's instructions after the battle:

"Here," said he, "you must make out a *fatteh nameh* (a proclamation of victory), which must immediately be sent into the different provinces, particularly to Khorassan, in order to overawe the rebel khans there; and let the account be suited to the dignity and character of our victorious monarch. We are in want of a victory just at present; but, recollect, a good, substantial, and bloody victory."

As the vizier observes, "Truth is an excellent thing when it suits one's purpose, but very inconvenient when otherwise."

*Hajji Baba in England* Morier's sequel, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (1828), had precedents in the satires of Montesquieu, d'Argens, and Goldsmith, who scanned the European world through the eyes of visitors from distant Asia. It was the converse of the utopian plan. These older authors were unacquainted with the lands and races taken as the imaginative criterion. In short, the comparison was purely abstract, an attempt to measure from zero. Morier is not so serious, not so philosophic. He knows his Persia almost as well as Hajji Baba, and explains his England to readers who are supposed to know as little about it as the Persians at home. Western manners, fashions, points of etiquette, attitudes of mind, social sentiments such as snobbery, are infinitely puzzling to their untutored intelligence. Current affectations of speech are incomprehensibles:

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"Ah!" said the mehmandar (interpreter), "no refinement can approach that which is now expected from the well-bred in England. Ingenuity is at work daily in inventing new words for those which not very long ago used to pass as perfectly admissible."

And such a paradoxical idea as the national debt as a form of wealth is stupefying to their imagination, if not an insult to common sense. Morier had hit upon a novel and crushing satirical device, but did not pursue it with the address he had shown in the original *Hajji Baba*. He turned his acknowledged familiarity with the East to further profit in a historical novel, *Zohrab the Hostage* (1832),<sup>1</sup> a sentimental romance, *Ayesha, the Maid of Kars* (1834), *The Mirza* (1841), and *Misselmah, a Persian Tale* (1847). Only a rare spark of the humour of *Hajji Baba* appears in these; but he reverted to something like it in *Martin Toutron, or the Frenchman in London in 1831* (1849), a novel which he wrote in French and then translated into English.

None of the romancers of sea or land is grimmer or more *Tre-*graphic in recounting incidents that make the blood run cold, *lawny's* and fights and escapes that hold the reader on the razor-edge of "Adven-  
suspense, than Shelley's and Byron's saturnine friend, Edward *tures of a*  
John Trelawny (1793-1881). He wrote two books, *Adventures* *Younger*  
*of a Younger Son* (1831) and *Recollections of the last days of*  
*Shelley and Byron* (1858). The former was given "to the  
world as a work of fiction," but no less categorically was it  
described by the author as "a true and particular history of  
my life from my earliest remembrances to my twenty-fourth  
year." What this means, with every allowance for such large  
episodes as the idyllic liaison with the Madagascar girl Zela,  
which are recognizably fiction, is that the younger son who  
tells the story, who commits murders, sails as a pirate, and  
is the most ferocious and remorseless egotist that ever secured  
a moment's interest in his career, must be identified with the  
author. Who would accuse himself, without the best of

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart reviewed *Zohrab* in the *Quarterly Review* for December 1832, and praised it laboriously for its literary merit and for its correctness, as tested by comparison with Sir John Malcolm's *History of Persia* (Lockhart's *Literary Criticism*, by M. Clive Hildyard, 100-101).



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reasons, of such monstrous behaviour? There are indeed things that might have been pilfered from other novelists. Others had described the hardships of a newcomer on a man-of-war. The farcical Van Scopelt seems reminiscent of Fenimore Cooper's surgeon in *The Spy*, always agog for an amputation or a corpse to dissect, and may be one of the stock members of a ship's personnel deriving from Smollett's Dr Mackshane.<sup>1</sup> Doubtless, Trelawny embellished his story, as he had every right to do; yet as a whole it reads like valid autobiography, the ugliest parts probably the truest, and the callous, violent, and defiant hero the least exaggerated of all. Trelawny's chapter-headings are all from Byron, Shelley, and Keats. It was this inspiration and that of the nautical novelists from Defoe and Smollett to Captain Marryat that made him write a romantic story for which his own past furnished such excellent material. The book has unity, or at least consistency, in the heaven-defying spirit of the hero and his loyalty to the finer De Ruyter, and in their war to the knife against the English. The idyll of his threatened bliss with the devoted Zela gives the relief of contrast with the general violence. If any edifying comparison is intended between the ne'er-do-well and the manly Aston and De Ruyter, this is certainly not emphasized. It seems like a touch of odd reminiscence to read of De Ruyter poring over Shakespeare whilst the hero idles and ruminates. He is obviously the writer's ideal, the strong man who has freed himself from the mad impulses that make such a mess of the other's life.

*Thrilling  
episodes*

There is no saying positively how much in this or in that incident is mere writing for effect; anyhow, it could not be bettered. Trelawny, if all accounts be true, was quite capable of protesting against a martinet's injustice by letting himself drop from the extreme end of the yard-arm, when ordered there instead of to the mast-head, where he would simply have gone to sleep.

Watching my opportunity, when the officers and crew were at their quarters at sunset, I took advantage of a heavy roll of

<sup>1</sup> Of course, such caricatures of anatomical enthusiasts were common enough in fiction, especially in the times of the resurrection-men.

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the ship, and dropped on the crest of a monstrous wave. I sunk deep into its bosom, and the agony of suppressed respiration, after the fall, was horrible. Had I not taken the precaution to maintain my poise, by keeping my hands over my head, preserving an erect posture in my descent, and moving my limbs in the air, I should inevitably have lost my life.

This and the fire in the powder-magazine read like well-remembered facts, and so do the capture of the Malay pirate and the repulse of the boats in the cutting-out expedition. Surely, too, that incident of the midnight rencontre with the crippled *Victory*, staggering home from Trafalgar with the body of Nelson on board, must be historical.

Our sails struck against the masts with a thundering sound; and the crew, scrambling up the hatchways in their shirts, but half awake, involuntarily screamed at the sight of the immense ship coming upon us. Panic-struck we could do nothing; and she, impelled by the fury of the sea and winds, was borne on, rolling and plunging, without sail or mast to steer or steady her. It was a scene that appalled the most hardy; some held out their arms wildly, and shrieked; others fell on their knees; and more threw themselves headlong down the hatchways; and though it was but a moment, such a moment makes a boy an old man. A loud and more distinctly heard voice, speaking through a trumpet, again hailed us,—it seemed our death summons,—“Starboard your helm, or we shall run you down!”

The *Victory* was “then the largest ship in the world.” One of the grisliest incidents, outdoing anything in Marryat or Michael Scott, is the death of the Parsee jeweller, who had tried to stab Trelawny—or his fictitious counterpart—with a poisoned creese, and drops into the stagnant slush at the bottom of the dock, where his convulsive struggles as he sinks make even Trelawny’s whole frame shake “as in sympathy with his sufferings.” The hatred of civilization, the obstinate preference for the wild life, the belief in a malignant destiny, with the denunciations of “accursed foresight,” and, finally, the unholy daring with which he recognizes sharks and

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alligators, man-hunting Malays and man-eating tigers as the ordained agents of a malicious Fate, seem to predict the dark philosophy of a Herman Melville or a Conrad.<sup>1</sup>

Indian  
histories  
or  
pseudo-  
histories

Of minor importance as literature, but a relevant example of a story based on more or less authentic records, and accepted more or less implicitly as genuine, was *Pandurang Hari, or the Memoirs of a Hindoo* (1826), by William Browne Hockley. It purports to be a loose translation from a native manuscript, and relates the experiences of a foundling, in the service of a maharajah in the Deccan, before the Mahrattas were conquered by the English, and afterwards in the employment of an English merchant at Bombay. He eventually turns out to be a prince, and a tale of rascality becomes a melodramatic novel of a commonplace type. The historical picture of a country in a state of anarchy, due to Oriental laziness, cowardice, and roguery, is not without value. Facts ascertained as the result of investigations by a zealous English officer, who was afterwards *Times* correspondent in India, were the basis of *Confessions of a Thug* (1839), by Colonel Philip Meadows Taylor (1808-1876). It is a novel only in shape; the confessions of ghastly and wholesale crimes were only too true; and the exposure bore fruit in the suppression of this confraternity of assassins by Sleeman. Meadows Taylor followed up the success of his timely book with several more in the Waverley style. *Tippoo Sultaun* (1840) dealt with the Mysore war of 1788-1789; *Tara* (1863), *Ralph Darnell* (1865), and *Seeta* (1873) were a trilogy, illustrating great events in the history of India, the rise of the Mahratta power, the victories of Clive, and the Mutiny. *A Noble Queen* (1878) deals with a still earlier period. They are able historical novels, if the emphasis is on the adjective; in short, they are instructive, and the instruction is sound, but is this the way to impart it? *The Confessions of a Thug* was at the best an effective tract. As to Cobbold's animated biography, *The History of Margaret Catchpole, a Suffolk Girl*

<sup>1</sup> It is fruitful to compare Trelawny's singular book, mingling reminiscences, or disguising them, with fiction, with such authentic records of travel experiences as Charles Waterton's *Wanderings in South America* (1825), Kinglake's *Eöthen* (1844), or W. G. Palgrave's narratives. Palgrave also wrote an excellent novel of Oriental life, *Hermann Agba*, which also furnishes points of comparison. But a still better comparison would be with the works of George Borrow.

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(1845), it belongs to a time-honoured species, the birth, life, and death of a popular hero; the gist of the story was given to Cobbold (1797-1877) by Margaret herself, and he had family recollections to eke it out.<sup>1</sup> This stanch and warm-hearted peasant (1773-1841) was a servant with the Cobbolds. She stuck to her sailor sweetheart, in spite of his lawlessness and continual relapses into crime. To save him from a perilous strait, she stole a horse and rode to London, was apprehended and sentenced to death. Reprieved but not released, she escaped from Ipswich gaol, and was then transported to Australia. Here her fine character won her a husband in a loyal old suitor who was now a flourishing landowner, and her later life was happy. The early chapters contain vivid accounts of smuggling, poaching, and sanguinary reprisals by the authorities—prose counterpart and corroboration of Crabbe's *Smugglers and Poachers*.<sup>2</sup>

None of those who followed more closely in the track of *The* Scott possessed his living knowledge of the past, none took *followers of Scott* the historical path because it was as familiar and well-beaten as the present. Nor were they like Hope, Morier, and Trelawny, overflowing with their theme, and constrained to write novels because strict autobiography or memoirs of travel were inadequate. Historical novels now called for special reading and research; and the natural result was that they kept more limitedly to the record, that creative imagination, when it existed, was held in check.<sup>3</sup> Harrison Ainsworth prided himself, not without cause, on his historical and topographical scholarship; Lytton put himself through a severe course of preparation before writing *The Last Days of Pompeii*; Charles Reade's note-books are as famous as

<sup>1</sup> Edward Sterling dramatized it the same year.

<sup>2</sup> The writer's mother, Elizabeth Cobbold, a minor poetess, who figures in these early chapters, is said to be the original of Mrs Leo Hunter, author of the ode to an expiring frog, in *Pickwick*.

<sup>3</sup> Ever since Scott showed how local history and antiquities could be made to yield romance to the imaginative student there have been published from time to time local historical novels, usually of small literary account and of little interest beyond the locality. One of the best of such stories came out in Scott's lifetime—*The Wolfe of Badenoch* (1827), by Sir Thomas Dick Lauder (1784-1848), an antiquarian well versed in the history of Morayshire and Speyside, who also published a classic *Account of the great Moray Floods of 1829*. It gives a romantic shape to the career of Alexander Stewart, Earl of Buchan (d. 1394), the lawless son of Robert II of Scotland.

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Zola's. But greater novelists found themselves hampered when they girded up their loins and applied a sterner realistic method to the reconstruction of a remote age, as Flaubert in *Salammbô* and George Eliot in *Romola*, which appeared within a year of each other, 1862 and 1863, times when the learned novelist felt as responsible for accuracy as if he were a recognized member of the new schools of history and archæology. But for three decades already historical fiction had become, not a branch of art in which a fertile imagination could work at large, as in the Waverley novels, but a matter of novels or romances of the conventional type, set in a framework or against a background of history, which paid tribute to the utilitarian demand for instructiveness; or else a study thrown into the form of a novel, claiming to show the inwardness of historical facts by presenting them in a new light with the clairvoyance of a specialist in human nature.<sup>1</sup> The costume novel, which sought chiefly the picturesque, and the drastic and probably biased reinterpretation of well-known events or a perplexing historical character, authenticated by the alleged superior insight of the novelist, were minor variations or exaggerations of these.

Feni-  
more  
Cooper

The earliest disciple of Scott of any standing, with the doubtful exception of Lockhart, whose *Valerius* appeared in 1821, was the American, James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851). At his wife's challenge to do better than some scribbler whose novel he had pooh-poohed, Cooper wrote the futile *Precaution, or the Choice of a Husband* (1820), the title of which describes it sufficiently: and then found his vocation in *The Spy, a Tale of the Neutral Ground* (1821). He was to do for New England what Scott's followers were about to do all over Europe for their native countries. Cooper was by inheritance a wealthy landowner, and a considerable magnate in the land which had recently asserted the liberties of man. Theoretically a democrat, and boastful of the war of independence, he had all the prejudices of his class; he might have been a Tory squire in the old country whose tyranny he denounced. He was strict, puritanical, hidebound in social punctilio, which

<sup>1</sup> "Facts are the mere dross of history" (Macaulay).

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was Mrs Cooper's chief preoccupation.<sup>1</sup> But his imagination had entered into a morganatic marriage with the romance of nature, instinct, simple manliness; and it was the Ishmael, child of this Hagar, that led his genius on its higher flights. His home at Cooperstown had been near enough to the frontier to teach him the lore of the virgin forest and what it had meant to be a pioneer. The days of the first settlers had passed away, the redskins had disappeared from the neighbourhood of Otsego Lake; but, like Scott, Cooper was within easy reach of the border, and from his father, commemorated in Judge Temple of *The Pioneers*, and from the friends of his boyhood, he imbibed memories and traditions of the old backwoodsmen and their conflicts and accommodations with the Indians, and of the French wars of colonial days as well as of the long struggle with the parent country. Like Scott again, he studied documents and read the recent literature of travellers and explorers, and eventually made himself an authority on the great era of the foundation of the States and the gradual advance to the West. Not an impeccable authority, however; Cooper was too full of prejudices, too obstinate and litigious a controversialist, irritable like his father, and always preparing for attack or defence. He could never write a story without scoring what he resented in the manners and local politics of his fellow-citizens. He always felt it incumbent upon him to instruct and edify, even the Europeans; and many of his later novels, for instance, *The Bravo*, *The Heidenmauer*, and *The Headsman*, are novels with a purpose, full of political and moral sermons of a provocative kind. But this weakness is less apparent in his early stories, which, with two or three afterwards linked on, are conspicuously his best.

*The Spy* is a tale of the revolutionary war, and the scenes "*The* are in the famous Neutral Ground, in Westchester County, *Spy*" where Cooper lived after his marriage. His wife belonged to <sup>and</sup> that county, and came of an old loyalist family. Hence he <sup>"*The Pilot*"</sup> knew the theatre of events by heart, and could hardly go wrong in depicting the state of vacillation, fear, and suspicion which

<sup>1</sup> "Cooper was a GENTLEMAN in the worst sense of the word" (D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 50).

had prevailed in a region between the hostile lines. Like most of his kindred novelists, Cooper provides an insignificant love-tale as the nominal centre of interest, and relegates the only characters who are of any account in themselves, to the circumference—that is, they are secondary figures. So far as the plot is concerned, the only function of the unobtrusive spy, albeit he gives the story its title, is to be of service to the lovers. But this humble, battered, stoical pedlar, Harvey Birch, is one of the most heroic beings in fiction; the soul of patriotism, yet condemned to meet his fate, not as a martyr for love of country, but under the stigma of foul disloyalty. It is a noble conception, if the embodiment is somewhat indistinct. Washington, his chief, also remains in the background as the mysterious Mr Harper; but though shadowy he is impressive. Harvey Birch had an original, but even Cooper did not know his name. The chapter-headings are mostly from Scott, and *The Pilot, a Tale of the Sea* (1824), Cooper's next story of the war of the revolution, was actually written in competition with one of Scott's minor novels. He had read *The Pirate*, which had passed as a good sea-story on the strength of Scott's general vraisemblance; but the nautical details were inaccurate, and he determined to write a story in which these should be unimpeachable. Cooper had been to sea, after being sent down from Yale; and, serving first in the merchant marine, he had received a midshipman's commission in 1808, and remained in the navy till his marriage in 1811. The whole action of *The Pilot* takes place on the North Sea, or at a spot on the British coast where there is a country mansion and a houseful of American young ladies of quality, on whom the enigmatic Paul Jones has mysterious designs. The famous corsair is drawn in a theatrical, Byronic manner; he mouths too much: "I was born on this orb, and I claim to be a citizen of it." "A man with a soul not to be limited by the ordinary boundaries of tyrants and hirelings." His sudden comings and goings are a riddle even to the ship's company. But the true soul of the book is Long Tom Coffin, of Nantucket, who discovers and harpoons a whale in these British waters, and goes

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back to the sea from whose womb he ought to have been born.

"I was born on board of a chebacco-man, and never could see the necessity of more land than now and then a small island to raise a few vegetables, and to dry your fish. I'm sure the sight of it always makes me feel uncomfortable, unless we have the wind dead off-shore."

This matter-of-fact individual is the very poetry of the sea, as Leather-stocking is the poetry of the primeval forest. Through his figure and some brilliant episodes of hairbreadth escapes from shipwreck on a lee-shore, Cooper must share the honours with Smollett of fathering the novel of nautical adventure.<sup>1</sup>

But a year previously Cooper had begun his most celebrated *The* group of romances, the Leather-stocking series, so named after Natty Bumppo, called Hawkeye in the second published, *The Last of the Mohicans*, but in this first, *The Pioneers*, or the *stocking series—The Sources of the Susquehanna* (1823), nicknamed Leather-stocking, *Pioneers*" from his long fringed leggings. Natty was an old man when Cooper ushered him upon the stage; in the second novel he appears in the prime of life; and, last of all, Cooper harked back to his youth. Hence it is convenient to set out the five books in biographical order, not as they were written: *The Deerslayer*, or *the first War-Path* (1841), *The Last of the Mohicans*, a narrative of 1757 (1826), *The Pathfinder*, or *the Inland Sea* (1840), *The Pioneers* (1823), and *The Prairie* (1827). Taken as a single whole, this is the most considerable American work of fiction, and the finest embodiment of national characteristics. *The Pioneers*, which Cooper subtitled "a descriptive tale," strikes the keynote of youthful enthusiasm for the vanishing glories of the virgin forest, and of poignant regret. In an introduction written at Paris, in 1832, the author relates how his father visited the scenes of the tale, the neighbourhood of Lake Otsego, then a wilderness, in 1785, and next year began the settlement of Cooperstown. The story opens in 1793, when the settlers were well established, and Natty the old backwoodsman is now a survival of the past,

<sup>1</sup> Dumas wrote a sequel to *The Pilot* in *Le Capitaine Paul* (1838).



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protesting, like Meg Merrilees, at his eviction from the log hut by the administrator of laws that he does not know:

"What would ye have with an old and helpless man?" he said. "You've driven God's creators from the wilderness, where his providence had put them for his own pleasure; and you've brought in the troubles and divilties of the law, where no man was ever known to disturb another. You have driven me to burn these logs, under which I've eaten and drunk—the first of Heaven's gifts, and the other of the pure springs—for the half of a hundred years; and to mourn the ashes under my feet, as a man would weep and mourn for the children of his body."<sup>1</sup>

So he must flee deeper into the wild, to escape the restraints of a civilization that he hates. Leather-stocking is the typical pioneer, the huntsman preceding the settler; such a one as Daniel Boone, whose name had been put on the popular roll of heroes for his exploits in Kentucky, and whose history Cooper would have read; although others, for instance David Shipman, who dwelt in a rude cabin near Cooperstown and so was a favourite candidate for the honour among his townsmen, may also have been remembered.<sup>2</sup> Like Long Tom Coffin, he is a blend of the real and the ideal; mother-wit and horse-sense, and the lyrical expression of Cooper's own sentiments, disgust at his fellow-countrymen and longing for a solitude unspoiled by a disillusioning civilization.<sup>3</sup> At the end of *The Pioneers*, the old man, "who had imbibed, unconsciously, many of the Indian qualities, though he always thought of himself as of a civilized being, compared even with the Delawares," cries out:

"When I look about me, at these hills, where I used to could count sometimes twenty smokes, curling over the tree-tops, from the Delaware camps, it raises mournful thoughts, to think, that not a Red-skin is left of them all; unless it may be a

<sup>1</sup> Another scene obviously suggested by Scott is the shooting at the Christmas turkey (xvii.), like the shooting at the popinjay in *Old Mortality*.

<sup>2</sup> The subject is discussed by Gibb (pp. 27–32). A statue was erected to Nathaniel (a mistake for David) Shipman in 1915, at Hoosick Falls, to the annoyance of the Cooperstown people, who, however, had no right to monopolize the credit for David.

<sup>3</sup> On Fenimore Cooper's disenchantment on returning from Europe to the United States see Gibb, 21–22.

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drunken vagabond from the Oneidas, or them Yankee Indians, who, they say, be moving up from the sea-shore; and who belong to none of God's creators, to my seeming, being, as it were, neither fish nor flesh—neither white man, nor savage. Well, well! the time has come at last, and I must go."

Natty is a fairly consistent person, though, inevitably, he varies a little from book to book. But Chingachgook, the old Delaware chieftain, who is meant to symbolize the Indian virtues prized by Leather-stocking, is only a vague shadow of his white friend. In *The Pioneers*, he makes but a shabby appearance, as Indian John, though he is described as trying "to hide the shame of a noble soul, mourning for glory once known." But, at any rate, he is a useful fighting-man, and his self-sacrificing death in the forest fire is a lofty scene, in the Byronic way:

"Why should Mohegan go?" returned the Indian gloomily. "He has seen the days of an eagle, and his eye grows dim. He looks on the valley; he looks on the water; he looks in the hunting-grounds—but he sees no Delawares. Every one has a white skin. My fathers say, from the far-off land, come. My women, my young warriors, my tribe, say come. The Great Spirit says come. Let Mohegan die."<sup>1</sup>

Cooper ranged far beyond the cradle of his boyhood and "the memories of his elders in *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Prairie*, and grew more romantic and more idealistic. The one is a tale of the Old French War of 1756-1757, when Natty was in the prime of life; the other, sequel to *The Pioneers*, is the final act, when the man of the woods has become the man of the prairie, and half blind, living as a trapper on the Upper Missouri, he journeys with a party of rugged Kentuckian pioneers towards the setting sun, and dies, gazing back to the east from whence he came. *The Last*

<sup>1</sup> D. H. Lawrence is pretty severe on the myth of Natty Bumppo and his blood-brotherhood with Chingachgook—"It's not good enough." Hawkeye, Leather-stocking, Deerslayer, is essentially a killer. He says: "Hurt nothing unless you're forced to." "And yet he lives by death, by killing the wild things of the air and earth." "You have there the myth of the essential white America. All the other stuff, the love, the democracy, the floundering into lust, is a sort of by-play. The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer. It has never yet melted" (*Studies in Classic American Literature*, 65-66).

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*of the Mohicans* takes its name from the son of Chingachgook, the lovely and lamented Uncas, incarnation of all the virtues ascribed by Cooper to good Indians. It is a drama of pursuits and escapes, in which redskins of a different moral colour from the Delawares, the hated Mingoes or Iroquois, bloodthirsty allies of the unscrupulous Montcalm,<sup>1</sup> carry off two white girls, who are ultimately rescued by Natty, Chingachgook, and Uncas, but at the cost of the young hero's life. The fiercest and most dangerous of the Mingoes, the diabolical Magua, who has the temerity to covet one of the white women for his squaw, might be the blood-brother of Brian de Bois-Guilbert.<sup>2</sup> He treats the peaceable David Gamut "with the contemptuous indifference of a haughty superiority"; and when he retires to his solitary tent to muse on his plans, before the time appointed for the warriors to assemble again, "it would not have been difficult to have fancied the dusky savage the Prince of Darkness, brooding on his own fancied wrongs, and plotting evil." Robert Montgomery Bird wrote *Nick o' the Woods, or the Jibbenainosay* (1837), to correct Fenimore Cooper, and show the redskin in all his natural ferocity. Yet if Cooper idealized his Delawares, surely his Mingoes are as ugly as the savages of Bird. In 1824 Cooper had made a trip to Lakes George and Champlain, round which the forest warfare rages, and was able to describe the woods and mountains with an exuberant pen. The poetry of place is a foremost element of his romanticism.

He had written many other books before he filled the gap in the middle of the series with his *Pathfinder*, and wrote *The Deerslayer* as an introduction to the whole sequence. In *The Pathfinder*, the equipping of an expedition against the English on Lake Ontario gives him an opportunity to utilize his naval experience. Natty, now in the thirties, falls in love; but realizes that he is not cut out for domesticity, and,

<sup>1</sup> "The Marquis of Montcalm can only settle that error with his God" (xx.).

<sup>2</sup> The hot-blooded Cora, who faces and suffers death rather than submit to Magua "rappelle la triste Rébecca" to Margaret Murray Gibb (*Le Roman de Bas-de-Cuir*, 94). It is pointed out in the same work that the kidnapping of the English commandant's daughters was probably suggested by the abduction of Betsey and Fanny Calloway and Jemima Boone, and their rescue by Daniel Boone, in 1776, as related in the history of Boone (Gibb, 31-32).

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with some grandiloquence, congratulates himself on being rejected. There is love also in *The Deerslayer*, where it also comes to nothing. This has as much charm as any of Cooper's books, the charm of youth and the forests, both unspoiled, for Lake Glimmerglass is Cooper's own Lake Otsego, which with the vast woods stretching from the banks of the Susquehanna he tries to imagine as it was all that time ago. He was good at reanimating an historic scene, a real episode, or the vanished life of settlers, the Indian tribes, the leaders and soldiers in the old wars, whose characters and records he knew from some personal recollections, the talk of his seniors, and much study of memoirs, official reports, and the like. In this imaginative handling of facts and local knowledge he worked like Scott, and he also tried like Scott to dovetail a sentimental romance into the semi-historical narrative. But except in these last additions to the Leather-stocking tales the people concerned in the subsidiary dramas are thin, characterless objects, and their stories indistinguishable from a thousand other love-tales. Cooper was heavy-handed in such matters, too like an elderly relative benevolently patronizing the tender affairs of the juniors. And he had all the prejudices of his age and order. He could be terribly gentlemanly and terribly ladylike.

The maiden trembled violently, and there was an instant, during which she bent her head aside, yielding to the emotions common to her sensitive sex; but they quickly passed away, leaving her completely mistress of her deportment, if not of her affections.

This is from *The Last of the Mohicans*; all that has upset the elegant lady is that one of her saviours from the savages has announced that he has her father's permission to propose.

Cooper had no sense of humour. This infirmity accounts *Some of* for the elephantine deference with which he invariably treats *his* the fair sex when they are of his own class. A lady's hand is *weak-* an object that excites reverential emotions: *nesses*

A hand, which exceeded all that the ingenuity of art could model, in shape and colour, veiled her eyes; and the maiden

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was sitting as if in deep communion with herself. Struck by the attitude and loveliness of the form that met his eye, the young man checked his impatience, and approached her with respect and caution.<sup>1</sup>

That is from *The Pioneers*. Or take the all but successful attempt of one of Magua's band to scalp one of the young ladies, in *The Last of the Mohicans*:

The Huron was a stranger to any sympathy in the moments of his fury. Seizing Cora by the rich tresses which fell in glossy confusion about her form, he tore her from her frantic hold, and bowed her down with brutal violence to her knees. The savage drew the flowing curls through his hand, and raising them on high with an outstretched arm, he passed the knife round the exquisitely moulded head of his victim, with a taunting and exulting laugh.

With a sense of humour and the finer perceptiveness that goes with it, Cooper would never have been guilty of the faults of style which are evident enough in the passages already quoted. He could be eloquent in describing landscapes that roused his enthusiasm or a scene of brisk action. Else, his style is one of the worst that ever hampered one who would otherwise have been a man of letters. But a fatal consequence of his lack of humour was the complete miscarriage of his efforts to vie with Smollett in his by-characters. These are introduced in the regular fashion of his master, with a plethora of external oddities and incongruities, suited to their particular kink. There is a collection of them in *The Pioneers*, but plenty of a similar brand elsewhere. Notice how the four men in the sleigh driving up to Judge Temple's quaint residence are hit off by their facial eccentricities: the charioteer, enveloped in a greatcoat from which peered a face "of an unvarying red colour," with his "habitual upward look, as if dissatisfied with its natural proximity to the earth"; the tall figure behind him, his face protruding from beneath a woollen nightcap—"the eyes alone appeared to create any obstacle, as from either side of his forehead their light, blue, glassy balls projected";

<sup>1</sup> *Pioneers*, xxxi. Cp. this from *The Pilot*: "A small hand, which seemed to blush at its own naked beauties, supported her head, embedded in the volumes of her hair, like the fairest alabaster set in the finest ebony."

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then the "solid, short, and square figure," with "a pair of black eyes, that gave the lie to every demure feature in his countenance . . . a fair, jolly wig furnished a neat and rounded outline to his visage"; and lastly, the "meek-looking, long-visaged man," protected from the cold only by "a black surtout, made with some little formality, but which was rather threadbare and rusty," with the hat "of extremely decent proportions, though frequent brushing had quite destroyed its nap." Dr Elnathan Todd's portrait is done in more detail, just as Smollett would have dealt with a man of physic:

In height he measured, without his shoes, exactly six feet and four inches. His hands, feet, and knees, corresponded in every respect with this formidable stature; but every other part of his frame appeared to have been intended for a man several sizes smaller, if we except the length of the limbs. His shoulders were square, in one sense at least, being in a right line from one side to the other; but they were so narrow, that the long dangling arms they supported seemed to issue out of his back. His neck possessed, in an eminent degree, the property of length to which we have alluded, and it was topped by a small bullet-head that exhibited, on one side, a bush of bristling brown hair, and on the other, a short twinkling visage, that appeared to maintain a constant struggle with itself in order to look wise.

In the grotesque man-servant, Benjamin Pump, is reproduced the nautical mania of Commodore Trunnion and Bos'n Pipes:

"By the lord, Squire," commenced Benjamin in reply, first giving his mouth a wipe with the back of his hand, "if this here thing had been ordered sum'at earlier in the day, it might have been got up, d'ye see, to your liking. I had mustered all hands, and was exercising candles, when you hove in sight; but when the women heard your bells [the sleigh-bells] they started an end, as if they were riding the boatswain's colt; and, if-so-be there is that man in the house who can bring up a parcel of women when they have got headway on them, until they've run out the end of their rope, his name is not Benjamin Pump. But Miss Betsy here must have altered more than a privateer in disguise, since she has got on her woman's duds, if she will

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take offence with an old man for the small matter of lighting a few candles.”<sup>1</sup>

Dick Fid, the old tar, and the nigger Scipio Africanus, in *The Red Rover*, are better drawn in the same vein, probably because they are still afloat. Cooper must have what credit is due for his share in establishing the nautical novel; but it was Smollett who supplied the realism and the salt-water humour, Cooper the seaman's technique and the adventures, which hardly fall short of Michael Scott's, and Michael Scott had probably read him. Few of the nautical novelists showed a mariner's neatness in putting their tales together. The construction of Cooper's novels is as slipshod as his prose; he started with a plan in his head, but he let the improvising habit carry him where it listed. Perhaps the most contemptible plot-trick on record is the letter half read out, in *The Pioneers*:

“I grieve to say, that’ hum, hum, bad enough to be sure—‘but trust that a merciful Providence has seen fit’—hum, hum, hum; seems to be a good pious sort of man, ’duke; belongs to the established church, I dare say; hum, hum—‘vessel sailed from Falmouth on or about the 1st September of last year, and’ hum, hum, hum.”

The reader must wait indefinitely before he can appreciate the significance of this precious communication and the nature of the “evil tidings” which he is told it conveys.

Cooper's  
stories

Of the large remainder of Cooper's stories perhaps a dozen are worth a mention, and one or two may even be placed side by side with the Leather-stocking novels. He turned again to historical fiction in *Lionel Lincoln, or the Leaguer of Boston* (1825), *The Wept of the Wish-ton-Wish* (1827), and *Wyandotte* (1843), the first of which is characteristically good on the Lexington skirmish and Bunker Hill, the second not so good on the war of King Philip of Pokanoket, and the third has a siege of a block-house very similar to those in *Satanstoe* and the Leather-stocking tales. The finest of his later sea-tales was *Wing-and-Wing, or le Feu-follet* (1842), though *Afloat and Ashore* (1844), the autobiography of Miles Wallingford, with its exposure of the iniquities of impressment, runs it

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the earlier chapters of *Peregrine Pickle*.

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close. *The Red Rover* (1828) was too romantic, but *The Two Admirals* (1842) showed again how Cooper could describe an action at sea. In one set of three stories, which he grouped together as the "Littlepage Manuscripts," he returned to the history of his own State of New York, tracing the fortunes of a family through three generations, and unfortunately involving himself in a violent campaign against the Anti-Rent party. Of these three, *Satanstoe* and *The Chainbearer* (1845) and *The Redskins* (1846), the first is by far the best, and the second partly redeemed from the dullness of excessive information and defunct controversy by the robust character of Thousandacres, the squatter. In *Satanstoe*, the journey to Albany is like the tour of young Anacharsis, topography and history made easy; yet the doings of Montcalm in the Seven Years War, the repulse of Abercrombie at Ticonderoga, and the hairbreadth escape of the sleighs from the break-up of the ice on the Hudson below Albany, are memorable examples of Cooper's narrative power. The defence of the block-house against the redskins, already mentioned, is one of those episodes in which he was always sure-handed.<sup>1</sup> Anneke is drawn with charm and no affectation; young Littlepage deserves his luck both as a lover and as a character in a novel; and Guert Ten Eyck, the overgrown boy, has genuine pith and individuality. A tour to the West in later days yielded a pleasant story of nature and of fights with Indians on Lake Michigan; this was *Oak Openings, or the Bee-hunter* (1848).

The best of several American followers of Cooper, and *His* indirectly of Scott, was William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870), *American* author of *The Yemassee*, *The Partisan*, *Mellichampe*, *Woodcraft*, *followers* and other novels dealing chiefly with events of the revolutionary war in Carolina. The pictures of old Virginia, Kentucky, and the Carolinas by John Pendleton Kennedy and James Kirke Paulding are rather in the quiet, leisurely, and racy style of Washington Irving than the stirring and eventful manner of historical fiction. Cooper alone of that generation of native novelists was known much outside the United States;

<sup>1</sup> The uproarious scene of the rape of the mayor's supper is clearly a rape from *The Bride of Lammermoor*, in spite of the disguise.



he must have been read by some of his English confrères, and his influence in French fiction was extensive.<sup>1</sup>

*The  
English  
followers  
of Scott*

A pedestrian and very painstaking copyist of Scott was Horace Smith (1779-1849), better known in connexion with *Rejected Addresses*. *Brambletye House, or Cavaliers and Roundheads* (1826), is an expansion of history of the same period as *Woodstock*, with historical characters in the foreground or the middle distance, hardly a name of any notoriety at the Court being omitted.<sup>2</sup> Though Smith obviously did not realize it, this was the very plan that Scott had taken care to avoid. De Quincey was no disciple of Scott, but an amateur of the tale of terror who happened upon historical settings for his own or his borrowed fictions. *The Incognito, or Count Fitz-Hum*, which he wrote in 1823, he said he translated "from the German of Dr Schulze, a living author of great popularity." It is heavily humorous in the German fashion on the hoax played upon a small town: an impecunious courtier of the reigning prince impersonates his serene highness, and contrives to marry the daughter of a wealthy counsellor. *The Dice*, also from the German, is a Faustian tale of miraculous dice which bring the holder riches but entail his damnation. In *The Avenger*, an epidemic of murders in an old German cathedral city proves to have been the work of a foreign nobleman of princely wealth and high distinction, whose Jewish mother had been barbarously done to death by the anti-Semitic burgomaster and counsellors. Probably the reign of terror caused by the mysterious murders owes its awful power to De Quincey's memories of the terrorist

<sup>1</sup> This is the main theme of *Le Roman de Bas-de-Cuir, étude sur Fenimore Cooper et son influence en France*, by Margaret Murray Gibb, 1927.

<sup>2</sup> They include the second Charles, Rochester, Nell Gwyn, Lady Castlemaine, Ormonde, Lilly the astrologer, Nicholas Culpeper, Arlington, Jermy, Monmouth, Sir Stephen Fox, Killigrew, Etherege, Milton, Marvell, Saint-Evremond, Gramont, Gerard Douw, etc. The local colour of Ashdown Forest, and of course London and Westminster, is well done. Horace Smith also wrote *The Tor Hill* (1826), *Reuben Apsley* (1827), and *Arthur Arundel* (1844), on the same recipe. The conscientious and industrious Mrs Anna Eliza Bray (1790-1883) may be bracketed with Horace Smith. She knew Devon and Cornwall best, and was well up in the history of the county families, but her Continental stories are also accurate in their topographical and historical setting. Southey appears to have prompted her "Romances of the West," the most famous of which is *Trelawny of Trelawne*. *The White Hoods* is good on the revolt of Ghent (1380-1382).

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Williams's fiendish butchery of the Marrs, recorded in the postscript to "Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts." *Klosterheim, or the Masque* (1832), is a Radcliffian novel skilfully using the disorders of the Thirty Years War as background. "The Spanish Military Nun" and "The Revolt of the Tartars" both purport to be historical narratives. The one is freely adapted from the picaresque life of a Spanish girl,<sup>1</sup> who among her adventures is believed to have actually traversed the Andes, as De Quincey magnificently describes, though the picaresque humour goes a little haltingly with his ponderous banter. The other is a page of obscure history rewritten, its epical climaxes well sustained by the organ music of his prose. Leigh Hunt was another versatile man of letters who dabbled in historical fiction. His pseudo-antique, *Sir Ralph Esher; Memoirs of a Gentleman of the Court of Charles II, including those of his Friend, Sir Philip Herne* (1832), is a minor work turning Leigh Hunt's knowledge of the town and of contemporary literature to profitable account.

We now come to a group of writers, headed by G. P. R. G. P. R. James, who made a profession of historical romancing, and *James* were extraordinarily prolific, though only a selection of their works have retained anything of their wide popularity. George Payne Rainsford James<sup>2</sup> (1801-1860) had such enthusiasm for Scott that he began writing romances when he was only seventeen. His *Life of Edward the Black Prince* (1822) appeared when he was twenty-one. Scott encouraged him by reading *Richelieu* in manuscript; yet James published this anonymously, and also the first half-dozen novels that followed. *Richelieu, or a Tale of France* (1829), had the same theme as De Vigny's *Cinq-Mars*, the ill-fated conspiracy; *Darnley, or the Field of the Cloth of Gold* (1830), *Philip Augustus, or the Brothers in Arms* (1831), *Henry Masterton, or the adventures of a Young Cavalier* (1832), *Mary of Burgundy, or the Revolt of Ghent* (1833), *One in a Thousand, or the days of Henri Quatre*

<sup>1</sup> According to Chandler (408), "a free rendering of the *Historia de la Monja Alférez, Donna Catalina de Erauso*, published at Paris in 1830 by Joaquin Maria de Ferrer, a Castilian refugee, but composed two centuries before in Spain."

<sup>2</sup> The wags called him "George Prince Regent James," a poke at his stateliness and his rather pompous elocution.

(1835), *Attila, or the Huns* (1837), *Agincourt, or the times of Henry V* (1844), *The Castle of Ebreinstein, or a Romance of Princes* (1847), and *The Fate* (1851), culminating in Monmouth's rebellion, are simply history romanticized or vamped up with melodrama. James was well-read, and received the post of historiographer royal for his novels and other works, from William IV. His style was dignified, but monotonous. The monotony of his matter became a byword; and Thackeray's parody of his stereotyped opening, in "Barbazure, by G. P. R. Jeames, Esq.,"<sup>1</sup> the two cavaliers threading the romantic gorge in the fading sunlight, has almost become his epitaph. In one group of his tales he hovers on the skirts of the picaresque; *The Brigand, or Corse de Leon* (1841), and *The Smuggler* (1845) are perhaps the best of these. But, as in *Forest Days, or Robin Hood* (1843), his lawless persons are always gentlemen, and actuated on the whole by philosophic motives. Chavigni, in *Richelieu*, is characteristic: good by nature, plotter by training, he is generous, and in a way high-minded; bold, crafty, and unscrupulous, yet not underhand or capable of treachery. The best are the historical figures: Attila, the Duke of Guise, Richelieu, Cinq-Mars, the Duke of Berwick; the rest are mostly null. To humour his mind was obtuse, and his attempts at a pleasantry are lamentable: "In order to change the conversation," says a character, "I made some observations upon the extreme beauty of the wild flowers." His dialogue is thus even more frigid and prosy than his narrative style, and utterly devoid of colloquial liveliness. He loved to work out tortuous intrigues. There are intrigues at the Court of Attila. James is thoroughly at home in tracing out complicated threads of malice, duplicity, and conflicting interests, and succeeds in making characters and motives distinct and in stimulating sympathy and suspense, at least, for some dramatic moments. He is, in truth, too lucid; he is so studious to make every little point clear that nothing is left to the reader's intelligence. And the endings are so uniformly happy that the reader fails to be moved by vicissitudes

<sup>1</sup> In *Novels by Eminent Hands*.

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which he well knows will not prove final and irremediable. *The Athenæum* was exactly right when it pointed out that the weakness of his novels was "dilution." James would have had better luck with posterity had he left but a handful of stories, instead of some threescore, all struck from the same die. But the industry of James, Harrison Ainsworth, Lytton, and other manufacturers of historical fiction can be understood when the avidity of readers is clearly appreciated. There was a steady market in the United States as well as at home. When Thackeray went to America in 1850 he was dismayed to find that, not he or Dickens, but this "teeming parent of romance" headed the list of the best-selling authors.<sup>1</sup>

William Harrison Ainsworth (1805-1882), friend of G. P. R. *Harrison* James and fellow-worker in *Ainsworth's Magazine* and *The Ainsworth New Monthly*, certainly had more go; though he took more *worth* liberties with fact, and was a crude writer who freshened up his style by introducing cant terms and thieves' slang into his dialogue and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> An alumnus of Manchester Grammar School, Ainsworth was intended for the law, but took to literature, writing for the magazines, and, after making his debut as a novelist, running periodicals of his own. At one time he was in business as a publisher for eighteen months. It was the age of the bucks, and Ainsworth dressed himself as showily and expensively as Bulwer or Disraeli.<sup>3</sup> He was noted for his immense self-esteem. His magazine contributions consisted of tales of terror that echoed the romanticism of the late eighteenth century. Mrs Radcliffe had for him "always inexpressible charms." But "The Spectre Bride," which appeared first as "The Baron's Bridal" (1821), is more like Monk Lewis, and "The Imperishable One" or "The Wanderings of an Immortal" recalls Godwin's *St Leon*. It was the Gothic, or rather a neo-Gothic, mania that led him into pseudo-historical romancing, as he did not seek to disguise.

<sup>1</sup> Thackeray was too spiteful with his quips, chiefly in *Punch*: James's "two-thousandth novel" was announced, and readers were admonished: "It is a popular delusion that the new series of Mr James's novels can ever be completed."

<sup>2</sup> S. M. Ellis deals with this at some length (249-254).

<sup>3</sup> Ellis quotes G. A. Sala as noting: "Count Alfred d'Orsay and William Harrison Ainsworth were two of the best-looking and the best-dressed men in London" (i. 263).

"*Rook-  
wood*"

He proposed to infuse "a warmer and more genial current into the veins of Old Romance" and so revive "her fluttering and feeble pulses," he wrote in an account of his first great success in *Rookwood*.<sup>1</sup> But others had already shown how to do that. "Romance, if I mistake not," he goes on, "is destined shortly to undergo an important change. Modified by the German and French writers—by Hoffman, Tieck, Hugo, Dumas, Balzac, and Paul Lacroix—the structure, commenced in our own land by Horace Walpole, Monk Lewis, Mrs Radcliffe, and Maturin, but left imperfect and inharmonious, requires, now that the rubbish, which choked up its approach, is removed, only the hand of the skilful architect to its entire renovation and perfection." An early novel, *Sir John Chiverton* (1826), published anonymously, was written in collaboration with a Manchester friend, John Partington Aston, although both in turn claimed the sole authorship.<sup>2</sup> The scene was the ancient Hulme Hall, which stood on the outskirts of Manchester. Similarly, the old mansion of Cuckfield Place, in Sussex, was the inspiration of *Rookwood* (1834), along with all that Ainsworth had learned from his Gothic predecessors. He was also indebted to the chronicles of roguery, from Awdeley and Harman to Grose, compiler of the *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785), which was the basis of Caulfield's *Blackguardiana* (1795) and to a large extent of several recent lexicons of flash lore. Ainsworth displayed the handiness of a good stage-carpenter, and was an excellent judge of the effects of brute sensationalism. He comes along with the whole Gothic bag of conjuring tricks—ancient manors, abbeys and cloisters, vaults and charnel-houses, corpses, coffins that burst and the dead who ope their eyes, ghosts, the ancestral curse, the omens announcing death, all the time-honoured eldritch plant, with bloodshed galore. The story is the stalest thing of all, the question between the heir in possession and the heir who has been branded as illegitimate; Scott had recently used it in *St Ronan's Well*. Nor can any sympathy be spared for characters who are corpses reanimated by the novelist, a mere resurrection man. Yet a breath comes in

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Ellis, i. 286-287.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-142.

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from the open air when Jack Palmer, *alias* Dick Turpin, arrives on the scene; and his ride to York with the Westminster constable close on his heels is a bit of fiery narrative. His mare Bess is a veritable Bayard,<sup>1</sup> and her death when she has saved her rider achieves real pathos. Ainsworth borrows Scott's practice of poetic epigraphs to the chapters, and overdoes the insertion of even full-length ballads.

*Crichton* (1837) was in the manner of *Quentin Durward*. "*Crichton* A Scots adventurer loves and wins a beauteous foundling who *ton*" turns out to be a princess of the house of Condé. He unhorses the most illustrious champions of his day, including Henry of Navarre himself. Another Valois, Henri III, the opposite to Scott's Louis XI except in bigotry and dissimulation, dominates the scene, with the terrible queen-mother, Catharine de Médicis, in the background. Among the stage bogies, Ruggieri is another Galeotti. History unrolled in the foreground, as in *Quentin Durward*; Ainsworth is learned, though not always accurate. Too many notabilities of the time infest the pages; and there are notes not only at the end but also intruded into the text, after being translated into the high-pitched rhetoric of Ainsworth's ebullient style. But it is curious how the Court affairs and the jealousies, savage feuds, and covert persecutions after St Bartholomew, recall Dumas, who had not yet, however, begun to publish his Valois romances. Chicot the jester is a lively performer. The big, crowded scenes, the pageantry, and the tournaments are after Scott, though far more high-coloured. But the rapid kaleidoscopic changes, the intrigue, the unflagging racket of cape and sword, are Dumas to a T. Can it be that Ainsworth had read or seen *Henri III et sa cour*, which was played on 11th February 1829 at Paris, and appeared in a brochure shortly afterwards? The external evidence is lacking; but it is impossible to believe that he inadvertently invented the Dumasian melodrama.

*Jack Sheppard* (1840) brought him back to a more familiar "*Jack* environment, where he remained, except for one or two *Shep-* Continental adventures, till the end of the chapter. Though *pard*"

<sup>1</sup> From *Renaud de Montauban* (see Volume I. 218). The ride was based on the tradition of Nevinnson, "Swift Nicks," who did the 220 miles, *via* Gravesend, Cambridge, etc., in less than fifteen hours.

better in construction and smoother in style than *Rookwood*, the story, which is or should be the main business, is thin, set descriptions, especially by the enumeration of detail, the method of Theodore Hook, taking up too much space. There is some rough-and-ready characterization; the characters act their parts, and that is the most that can be said. There are attempts at humour and pleasantry, also after Scott. The hero was no doubt appropriated from Defoe, who supplied all that was required for the graphic account of the tempest which swept London and the Thames in 1703.<sup>1</sup> In the escape of Thames Darrell which synchronizes with this, and his rescuer's fearful passage under the arch of London Bridge on the edge of the raging torrent, Ainsworth is at his best. Jack and his doxies, Edgeworth Bess and Poll Maggot, follow history and tradition. The villain is Jonathan Wild, with his understrapper Blueskin. The latter makes friends with Jack Sheppard, and nearly has the other's life on various occasions. But Ainsworth's Jonathan Wild is different from Fielding's. Apart from the profound intellectual interest of that masterly study, it was too abstract and purged of actuality to serve the purposes of a sensation novel.<sup>2</sup> Here the realism, if it can be called realism, is brutal. Ainsworth's Jonathan is loathsome, and his incredible cynicism and malignity make the flesh creep, as was intended; melodrama can be horribly realistic, in spite of the laughter excited by obvious exaggeration. The plot relies upon the boldest coincidence; Jonathan Wild and Jack Sheppard always show their hideous faces at the moment of dreadful suspense, though it is not clear how they got there or what is going on behind the scenes. But the professional shocker has its fits of rank sentimentalism. The irreclaimable Jack Sheppard is reclaimed, chiefly through horror at the superior truculence of Jonathan Wild, and risks his life to save his mother from that ruffian—who proposes to marry her, for he knows she is the missing daughter of a wealthy knight—and to save his former rival and the girl he loves. The rival is a lost child, who after unheard-of escapes proves to be an

<sup>1</sup> For Defoe's *John Sheppard* and *The Storm*, see Volume III. 220 and 133.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume IV. 108-109.

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Englishman of high birth and also a French marquess. Even Blueskin becomes a sentimental hero: "Had I not known that you and your affianced bride are dearer to him [Jack Sheppard] than life, I should have used this money to secure my own safety. Take it, and take the estates, in Captain Sheppard's name." Verily, "the Ways of Providence are inscrutable," as one of the characters fervently remarks.<sup>1</sup>

*The Tower of London* (1840), which ran neck and neck with *Other Guy Fawkes*,<sup>2</sup> with *Old St Paul's* (1841), *The Miser's Daughter* <sup>stories of</sup> (1842), *Windsor Castle* (1843), and *St James's, or the Court of London* <sup>and the</sup> *Queen Anne* (1844), formed a batch in which the local colour <sup>provinces</sup> was laid on thick, and was perhaps the motive, or rather the excuse, for writing them. It is a sort of sandwich, heavily buttered with romantic melodrama, with a fat slice of history in the middle. The death of Edward VI, Northumberland's conspiracy to seat Lady Jane Grey on the throne, the accession of Mary, Wyatt's rebellion, and the execution of the unhappy Lady Jane, are the cardinal events. Many take place in that over-Gothicized pile, the Tower; the torture chamber, Gog and Magog, and eligible material rifled from Stow, are presented with considerable inaccuracy. The Radcliffian *Miser's Daughter* has a certain lurid power, and a moral to which the author anxiously called attention, in the wretchedness drawn down upon the individual by mammon-worship. In *Old St Paul's* he had followed Defoe in detailing the experiences of a London grocer and his family during the years of the Plague and the Fire; here, in the pictures of town life and the frivolities of Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and Marylebone Gardens, he is a very distant echo of Fanny Burney. *Windsor Castle* is perhaps the best of this group; with his determination to omit nothing, he made it a regular compendium of the historical and legendary associations of the sacred spot.

*Guy Fawkes, or the Gunpowder Treason*, afforded Ainsworth *Lancashire* an opportunity to show his knowledge of old Manchester, and <sup>shire</sup> he did it to more purpose than he had used London colour in <sup>stories</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As usual, there is much intrusive antiquarianism—e.g. "Skirting the noble gardens of Montague House (now, we need scarcely say, the British Museum), the party reached Great Russell Street—a quarter described by Strype," etc.

<sup>2</sup> It ran "chapter by chapter" with the latter (Ellis, i. 406).



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the foregoing novels; at any rate, the knowledge was more exceptional, and he showed enthusiasm for his old home. Humphrey Chetham and other local worthies are brought in, although they had not the remotest connexion with the conspiracy. Ainsworth's sympathies leaned towards the Roman Catholics, who had suffered grievously in Lancashire. He had the advantage of local knowledge also in *The Lancashire Witches* (1849), to which he wrote an introduction dealing with Whalley Abbey, Assheton Hall, and other local houses, which provided the shifting stage. The wilds of Bowland Forest and Pendle Hill are the later scenes. The story of the Pilgrimage of Grace (1536) makes a sort of prologue; and then Ainsworth comes to his chosen subject, the malicious practices and mad orgies of the witches, as they were described at the trials for witchcraft, at Lancaster in 1612. This was just the theme to appeal to his fevered romanticism, and he made good spectacular use of it. He returned to Manchester in *Mervyn Clitheroe* (1858), dwelling on his own schooldays; but the public were disappointed, for it did not provide an exciting story—naturally, since in this case Ainsworth had no exciting material to work upon, and he was no inventor.<sup>1</sup> *Preston Fight, or the Insurrection of 1715* (1875), and *The Leaguer of Lathom* (1876), a tale of the Civil War, also had the advantage of his Lancashire knowledge. His love of the occult ought to have made a more impressive work of *Auriol* (1865), a story of the elixir of life; but somehow he bungled it, and the mysteries and nightmare adventures terminate lamely.

*Captain Marryat* Captain Marryat's first novel, *The Naval Officer* (1829), came out anonymously the same year as James's *Richelieu*, when Harrison Ainsworth had published nothing more important than a number of magazine stories. Frederick Marryat (1792–1848), after trying several times to run away to sea, was allowed to enter the navy in 1806. The ship he joined was the *Impérieuse*, commanded by that fine sailor Lord Cochrane, afterwards Earl of Dundonald; and he saw much active service on this vessel till after the future admiral's

<sup>1</sup> It was coming out as a serial, and he had to stop it after the fourth number, resuming and completing it six years later.

removal in 1809, shortly before his expulsion from the English navy. The young man served in various ships in the Mediterranean, the West Indies, and on the North American station, till the end of the great war, and afterwards commanded with no small credit various expeditions in Burma, retiring after twenty-four years of service in 1830. Such early fiction of his as *The Naval Officer, or Scenes and Adventures in the Life of Frank Mildmay*, *Peter Simple*, and *Midshipman Easy*, are packed with recollections of his own experiences; Captain Savage, in the last-named, is drawn from Cochrane, and many of the raciest figures in these and other books must have had their originals among his shipmates. This first novel, perhaps better known as *Frank Mildmay*, though scarcely an earnest of the quality to be expected from Marryat, was very successful with the public; and he now applied himself with the energy he had shown in naval affairs to writing more, to editing his *Metropolitan Magazine* (1832-1835), and trying to extract a regular income from a mismanaged estate. Marryat also travelled a good deal, and one of his poorest but most remunerative books was *A Diary in America* (1839). No doubt, he began writing fiction describing life on shipboard because he was full of the subject and enjoyed writing about it; but he overworked the vein and wore himself out in the effort to repair his crippled finances.<sup>1</sup> Marryat held strong views on naval matters—and on the condition of the labouring classes in England too. He had written a pamphlet on the evils of impressment in 1812, and in his novels never lost sight of abuses that cried out for reform. In an eloquent though misplaced outbreak in *Midshipman Easy* he says: "We do not write these novels merely to amuse,—we have always had it in our view to instruct." What he has in mind is, not edification in the ordinary sense, but redress of grievances, naval grievances especially. At times, he was as polemical and litigious as Fenimore Cooper. But too much stress must not be laid on this ulterior purpose, which accounts for many defects and in no wise for his merits. His grievances

<sup>1</sup> Dibelius asserts flatly that Marryat had none but a pecuniary ambition—"er keinen anderen Ehrgeiz hat, als sich einen finanziell verwertbaren Namen zu machen" (283). This is a little too strong.

and personal grudges explain some things in Marryat, his ill-conditioned heroes of the stamp of Frank Mildmay and Percival Keene, for instance, and certain others of his black sheep sketched with easy-going toleration. Fits of cantankerousness are bound to lead the novelist astray. But it is to his growing monetary embarrassments and the too-rapid composition of his later novels that must be set down his repetition of motives, his hasty acceptance of any good yarn with a point in it, without much attention to good taste or the moral bearing, and his general careless workmanship. He was an improviser, with a fund of reminiscences ready for stringing together, like so many others.

*His first  
novels*

Marryat was, firstly, a disciple of Smollett, knowing vastly more about the sea than his master did; and then, the historian in fiction, after Scott's example, of the tremendous scenes of action in which he himself had borne his part. He also had more than a touch of Gothic romance in his tastes and predilections, which he may have imbibed from Smollett's *Count Fathom*, but nourished from his reading in more recent novelists.<sup>1</sup> Though not quite so didactic as the words just quoted might suggest, he was careful, like his contemporaries, to maintain a wholesome tendency in his plots. He shared their sentimental desire for proper rewards and penalties for the well and the badly behaved, and supplied these regularly in the general wind-up. Unfortunately, his first hero, Frank Mildmay, was a mean and unscrupulous person who engages no one's sympathies and in whose repentance no one can believe, or rejoice in his ultimate good fortune.<sup>2</sup> Criticism, however, was lenient, in view of the spirited account of life

<sup>1</sup> Dibelius (299-300) finds definite precedents in Radcliffian fiction for a large proportion of Marryat's tyrannical skippers, rascally complots, smugglers' dens, secret chambers, and the like. He certainly finds endless analogies of plot and machinery, which were borrowed, and developed, and modified by one novelist after another. But romantic effects appealed to Marryat both positively and negatively; he enjoyed the thrill, he was also amused. His fondness for them did not lead to mere imitation of Mrs Radcliffe, whom he would rather have laughed at. Dibelius is well-read and often acute; but factual, mechanical, on the look-out for loans, imitations, repetitions of traits and extravagances that were everybody's booty.

<sup>2</sup> Chandler is too hard on Marryat: "No one but the author has ever mistaken Mildmay for a gentleman. This proved unfortunate, since much of his career was recognizably Marryat's own" (ix. "Adventurers afloat and ashore"—3, "Marryat and the essayists," p. 399).

on shipboard, where the book was written; and more genial characters and more enthralling events, in those which quickly followed, left it in relative oblivion. *The King's Own* (1830), with a better plot, told the story in graphic terms of the mutiny at the Nore, and contains one of Marryat's great sea episodes, the feat of an English captain who deliberately loses his frigate on a lee shore in order to wreck a French line-of-battle ship.<sup>1</sup> *Newton Forster* (1832) was more commonplace; the waif saved from a wreck proves to be the child of a rich French marquess—a tale enlivened with overmuch farce and horseplay.

*Peter Simple* (1834) is the autobiography of a youngster who "Peter enters the navy, like Marryat, as a midshipmite, has adventures, *Simple*" hardships, successes and setbacks, and, after defeating a scheme for robbing him of his birthright, succeeds his grandfather as Lord Privilege and is made a post-captain. Though written down a dunce, he is a bright, plucky, guileless lad, whose mishaps are due to the naughtiness of others or average ill-luck. The fun is in the broad comedy of the characters among whom he is thrown. These mariners are for the most part great big boys; their manliness and loyalty give the right heroic note, in spite of some coarseness suited to a petty officers' mess. Such, for instance, is Mr Chucks, the genteel-born, who being found half-drowned in the captain's jacket is taken by the Swedes for an officer, is made captain of a frigate, and becomes Count Shucksen. "It was the darling wish of my heart," he said, "I was to be made a gentleman." His dying will and testament is in keeping with this—bequeathing an estate that does not exist. Swinburne, the quartermaster, and the philosophic Mr Muddle, are of the same pleasant sort, and also Mrs Trotter, the bumboat woman, who finds a counsel for Peter at the court martial and is ready to finance him without even a promissory note. On the other hand, there is Captain Kearney, the British Munchausen, and Captain Hawkins, byblow of Lord Privilege, whose cowardice, bullying,

<sup>1</sup> David Hannay (introd. to *Japbet*, 1895) points out that the exploit was like the hunting of *Les Droits de l'homme*, by Pellew, in 1797, and was probably based on this; but "neither of the English captains meant deliberately to lose his ship . . . Marryat has magnified the feat."

and spying ruin the moral of the *Rattlesnake's* crew and all but undo Peter. Captain Savage was a portrait of Cochrane; the great achievement of the club-hauling of the *Diomede*, one of Marryat's most brilliant episodes of the sea, being borrowed, however, from Captain Hayes, of the *Magnificent*. Even such normal but sterling characters as Peter's lifelong friend and protector, Terence O'Brien, are by no means flat; O'Brien is so stanch and jolly that his every appearance comes like a refreshing breeze.<sup>1</sup> It is an admirable general view of life in the navy, with many incidents that were in substance historical, the great hurricane,<sup>2</sup> the capture of the privateer in harbour under the enemy's guns, and the famous club-hauling. The conclusion is sheer farce. Through his grandfather's malice, Peter gets incarcerated in Bedlam, and the rescuer is the Colonel O'Brien who had befriended him as a prisoner in France. Of course, Celeste, the colonel's daughter, is not far off. It was she who recognized Terence when he and his fellow-fugitive Peter danced on stilts disguised as peasants. The long-lost sister appears on the stage as the chief singer in a musical comedy: "she cast her eyes up—saw me—the recognition was mutual—I held out my arm, but could not speak—she staggered, and fell down in a swoon." After that, the wooing of Celeste by Peter and of Eileen by his friend is done with nautical dispatch. "Having disposed of the ladies, the gentlemen now shook hands, and although we had not all appetites to finish our breakfasts, never was there a happier quintette." The fifth was Colonel O'Brien, who had no objection to offer when Peter had become Lord Privilege.

"*Jacob Faithful*" *Jacob Faithful* (1834) was a similar mixture of broad fun and naval history, and so was *Midshipman Easy* (1836). Jacob, who tells his own tale, is a charity schoolboy, apprenticed to

<sup>1</sup> There was a real O'Brien, whose similar performance to that narrated by Marryat, in the action with the Spaniard *Glorioso*, is recorded in *Voyages and Cruises of Commodore Walker*. The story of the escape is amplified from *The Narrative of Marryat's brother officer, Donat Henchy O'Brien, afterwards rear-admiral, who escaped from Verdun* (1808).

<sup>2</sup> See account of the hurricane in the West Indies (11th October 1780), reported in *London Gazette* (23rd–26th December) and quoted by Commander W. B. Rowbotham (*Times Lit. Suppl.*, 31st May 1934, p. 392).

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a Thames waterman. He and his chum are impressed, and "Mid-see service on a frigate. *The Pacha of Many Tales* (1855), a <sup>shipman</sup> miscellaneous collection of yarns from historical and other *Easy*," sources, came between this and *Mr Midshipman Easy*, which <sup>etc.</sup> is on the biographical plan, like *Roderick Random* or *Peregrine Pickle*; but in the philosophic father and the silly mother, and such extravagances as the death by phrenology or the duel by trigonometry, it tries at Sterne's humour whilst eschewing his sentimentalism. The cutting-out expedition, the capture of the Russian frigate, and the nautical adventures in general, call up vividly the great days of the world war. But in his next novel, *Japhet in Search of a Father* (1836), Marryat coolly turned his back on the sea and followed the picaresque trail as it had been blazed by Smollett. The foundling who tells his own story, with plenty of self-conceit, is a young cad, although he pleads that, if a rogue, he is "the rogue of circumstances." Marryat's sense of what behoved a gentleman was, to put it leniently, not more refined than his great master's. After more than anyone's fair share of vicissitudes, Japhet all but renounces the quest for his unknown father, and moralizes heavily—sometimes in the style of three times his age:

"I had been twice taken up to Bow Street—nearly lost my life in Ireland—had been sentenced to death—had been insane, and recovered by a miracle, and all in prosecuting this useless search. All this had much contributed to cure me of the monomania. . . . I recalled the treatment I had received from the world—the contempt with which I had been treated—the heartlessness of high life, and the little chance of my ever again being admitted into fashionable society."

If he might have thought all that, yet his arguments with Melchior on the problem of evil and the injustice of punishing us for offences "allotted to us by destiny" do not sound like a boy. But such stumbles in matters of vraisemblance were inevitable to the forced marches of Captain Marryat's novel-writing. Japhet, in a series of farcical occurrences, at length discovers his father, and with farcical resourcefulness tames the recalcitrant old savage. The story goes with a swing,

though the characters are either commonplace or borrowed, with the exception perhaps of Susannah, who is rather charming as a quakeress. Japhet and Timothy are the time-honoured pair, like Roderick Random and Strap; Japhet in his relation to his father recalls Tom Bowling and Roderick's stingy old grandfather; Mr Cophagus and Mr Pleggett, the rival apothecaries, are marvellously like Potion and Crab, in the same novel, *Roderick Random*; and Aristodemus the soothsayer is recognizably the Cadwallader of *Peregrine Pickle* in another suit of clothes.<sup>1</sup>

“*Snarley-*  
*yow, or*  
*the Dog*  
*Fiend*” There followed what was Marryat's most ambitious and perhaps his most striking novel, *Snarley-yow, or the Dog Fiend* (1837). Though he described it as a historical novel, and dated it precisely from January 1699 to May 1700, fitting it to definite historical events, it is nevertheless a frolic, a grotesque and oftentimes gruesome fantasy, the true hero and heroine of which, Snarley-yow the dog, and Wilhelmina, daughter of the Amsterdam syndic, never meet. The grotesques are imagined and described in the Smollett fashion; whilst the broad farce of most of the narrative heralds the approach of Dickens, or rather shows from what sources Dickens learned that side of his craft, much better than does the mere random horseplay of Pierce Egan and his tribe. The nefarious skipper Cornelius Vanslyperken and his dog are a pair to be hung near Lismahago and Humphry Clinker, though Smallbones, the poor devil of a cabin-boy, who cannot be drowned, poisoned, shot, or beaten to death with a hammer, is a closer parallel to Humphry. He is the prototype of Dickens's simpletons and friendless boys, such as Oliver Twist, Kit Nubbles, Poor Jo, and Pip. But neither the strange retinue of characters nor the horrors are to be taken more than half seriously. The pathos of Vanslyperken's devotion to his hideous cur, and the pluck and endurance of that almost imperishable brute, do not stir the feelings. The reader is to

<sup>1</sup> See Volume IV. 203-207, 211-212. A good thing, probably *ben trovato* like others in Marryat, is the story of Talbot, who claimed to be “in mind as brave as any man in existence,” but unfortunately had “a cowardly carcass.” It may perchance have suggested the infinitely finer, because more serious, study of moral courage combined with physical cowardice, in Stevenson's steward, in *The Master of Ballantrae*.

laugh, or at least to smile, at the artificial tragedy of Mrs Vanslyperken's attempt to murder Smallbones, and at her death, as at the lurid threatnings of the old hag, shunned by all as suspect of "some horrid and appalling crimes," "one to be avoided as a basilisk." She is a foretaste of Scrooge or Quilp and his like. When Vanslyperken brings his mother the gold, and reports himself a traitor but unfortunately not yet a murderer, for he has failed to dispatch Smallbones, she ejaculates:

"They may find you out—they may hang you—but they shall never wrest the gold from me. It will be quite safe—quite safe, with me, as long as I live. I shall not die yet—no, no."

Vanslyperken rose to depart; he was anxious to be aboard.

"Go, child, go. I have hopes of you—you have murdered, have you not?"

"No, no," replied Vanslyperken, "he lives yet."

"Then try again. At all events, you have wished the murder and you have sold your country for gold. Cornelius Vanslyperken, by the hatred I bear the whole world, I feel that I almost love you now;—I see you are my own child. Now go, and mind to-morrow you bring the gold."<sup>1</sup>

None of Marryat's novels has a more varied assortment of nautical characters, all stamped with the outward and visible traits of Smollett's burlesque of humanity, though drawn for the most part with kindness instead of derision. Look at Jansen, or Obadiah Coble, or Dick Short, "short in stature,

<sup>1</sup> xxiv. Dibelius is on the wrong track (ii. 299) in comparing Vanslyperken to the Radcliffian tyrant, and in discerning the influence of Mrs Radcliffe *passim* in Marryat's fictions. *Snarleyvow* is a piece of sardonic humour entertaining itself with the macabre. The German critic goes much too far afield in finding the skipper's best analogue in the Aaron of *Titus Andronicus* (*Ibid.*, 452). On the other hand, he hits the nail on the head when he instances Nancy and Bill Sikes as cases in which Dickens was indebted to Marryat, and contends that Marryat was the medium of transition from Smollett to Dickens (*Ibid.*, 301). It is difficult to follow him also when he asserts that Marryat elsewhere adopts the loose structure of Smollett's story-telling, but in this novel cannot escape the Radcliffe influence and so tightens up the plot a bit (*Ibid.*, 301). The plot is complicated and perhaps ingenious, but is merely the melodrama of commerce. One is sceptical again as to the alleged seriousness of Marryat in dealing with such problems as the unfortunate honourable impostor, the friendly murderer, etc. (*Ibid.*, 326). There is too much of what Abel Chevalley called "messianism" in his description of the way Theodore Hook, Marryat and others "prepared for" Dickens, etc. (*Ibid.*, 327).



short in speech, and short in decision and action." Or at Corporal Van Spitter, "tall, and so corpulent, that he weighed nearly twenty stone." When he is quietly engaged in winning the widow Vandersloosh and cutting out the lieutenant, the pair of them on the sofa in the *Lusthaus* are like a pair of amorous elephants. Likewise Jemmy Ducks, the bos'n:

He was indeed a singular variety of human discrepancy as to form: he was handsome in face, with a manly countenance, fierce whiskers, and long pig-tail, which on him appeared unusually long, as it descended to within a foot of the deck. His shoulders were square, chest expanded, and, as far as half-way down, that is, to where his legs were inserted into the human frame, he was a fine, well-proportioned man. But what a falling off was there!—for some reason, some accident, it is supposed, in his infancy, his legs had never grown in length since he was three years old: they were stout as well as his body, but not more than eighteen inches from the hip to the heel; and he consequently waddled about, a ridiculous figure, for he was like a man *razeed* or cut down. Put him on an eminence of a couple of feet, and not see his legs, and you would say at a distance, "What a fine-looking sailor!" but let him get down and walk up to you, and you would find that nature had not finished what she had so well begun, and that you were exactly half mistaken.

Jim is completed, however, by his wife Moggy, who could either carry off her husband in her arms like a baby, or put the lieutenant to flight with a red-hot poker. On the other hand, there is novelty in the woman of the streets, Nancy Corbett, who becomes an honest wife, and is the most able of the feminine garrison of the Jacobite smugglers. She is a creation that Dickens was to copy in Sikes's Nancy, and in fact the original of a favourite figure of sentimental idealism in Victorian fiction down to Gissing's *Unclassed*.

*Later  
novels*

Marryat did not quite repeat this success in *The Phantom Ship* (1839), a rehandling of the legend of the Flying Dutchman, which also wrings terror out of the old superstition of the werewolf in the story of the second mate of the *Vrou Katerina*. *Poor Jack* (1840) is the sentimental history of an ill-used seaman,

and there is overmuch of the sentimental and the didactic in *Masterman Ready* (1841), a tale of Crusoe life on an island, though the tone here is cheerful, apart from the heroic death of the old sailor. This, however, like *The Children of the New Forest* (1847), stands well as a book for young people, as those can testify who remember reading it at the right age. Boyish affection and invincible loyalty and devotion are movingly portrayed, if nasty Tommy Seagrave is rather a makeshift foil. Then, in *Percival Keene* (1842), Marryat shows once more how uncertain he was about the distinction between good and bad form, and the shades of difference between a mere scapegrace and a blackguard. Percival, who at any rate tells his story extremely well, is very proud of himself as a practical joker, whose jokes are usually malicious, who poisons his teacher and tries to blow him up, appears as a ghost to his grandmother and frightens her into fits, and on shipboard behaves as a capable and successful officer but not as a gentleman.<sup>1</sup> A similarly complacent attitude to sheer rascality comes out in *Joseph Rushbrook, or the Poacher* (1841); and the heroine of the posthumous *Valerie* (1849), a book probably not all Marryat's own, is no better than a female picaro. But he cannot fairly be judged by these later works. To compare him with Michael Scott, that other ardent admirer of Smollett, is, beyond the more obvious similarities and differences, largely a matter of personal taste.<sup>2</sup> The experiences upon which they worked were parallel but not quite the same; they had the same weakness for the horseplay which does not shrink from brutality. Scott's episodes are even more exciting than Marryat's, but the latter took pains to tell a more consecutive story, and his humour is altogether more genial.

In another case, that of the Hon. Edward George Greville *Edward Howard* (*d.* 1841), who collaborated with his former shipmate *Howard Marryat* on the *Metropolitan Magazine* and whose *Rattlin the Reefer* (1836) was published as "edited by the author of *Peter Simple*," internal evidence should put beyond the shadow of

<sup>1</sup> Dibelius seems right in detecting some indebtedness to Sterne here—e.g. "Mrs Culpepper ist eine zweite Mrs Shandy" (vi. 317).

<sup>2</sup> See Volume V. 249-250.

doubt that Marryat was not the author, as was widely believed. Howard's best book was the historical *Sir Henry Morgan the Buccaneer* (1842), and he wrote other novels of the sea: *The Old Commodore* (1837), *Outward Bound* (1838), and *Jack Ashore* (1840), all manifestly under the influence of Marryat. But Marryat was incapable of Howard's gloomy strength and penetration into a concentrated, gloomy mind, such as Rattlin's, which at this time of day seems suggestive of Herman Melville and Conrad. Despite an unrestrained weakness for punning and an overstrained liveliness and whimsicality, Howard's style is as forcible and mordant as Smollett's, and his power of graphic description remarkable. If Howard had not had the docility to accept the conventional machinery of a mysterious birth and a villainous scheme to supplant Rattlin as the true heir to Sir Reginald Rathelin, such a plot, that is, as those of *Peter Simple* and *Japhet*, this might have been a small masterpiece. But, as it is, Rattlin retains enough of his solipsism to abjure matrimony, even when he has recovered wealth and honours. Howard has a philosophy: "Nothing that has mind is, of necessity, low; and nothing is vulgar but meanness."

There is poetry also, perhaps too much. Rattlin, the schoolboy, resolves "to devote myself entirely to divine abstraction, to heavenly glory, and to incessant worship." He makes himself a laughing-stock as being the only person sensible to natural beauty. His schooling at the Roots' Academy is more terrible than the Dotheboys Hall regime: the locking-out episode is drama, not farce. And at that day "a man-of-war was made the alternative of a jail," as he vividly shows. When Rattlin recounts his hardships and maltreatment, such as the mastheading that nearly finishes him, or the common heroisms of the service, it is a stern sort of pathos that emerges, with no sentimentalism, as in the incident of the pressed bumpkin who is ordered up into the rigging: "As I looked down upon him, I saw that he was doomed," and in an instant the poor wretch is jerked to his watery grave. Even so the little idyll of the beautiful slave girl in the Bermudas has a grim pathos which stirs inscrutable feelings.

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"Let me die by cruelty rather than by caresses, which are the worst of cruelty. I feel a new spirit living within me. I am a child no more. . . . You have pressed me to your bosom—you have spoken to me as your equal—even your tears have bathed my brow. You have ennobled me. Oh! it is a happiness and a great glory. I, formerly so humble, command you to go—go, dear, dear Ralph. You will not kill me quite by going *now*, therefore, be generous, and go."

The Mephistophelian villain, melodramatic though he presently becomes, with his impish air of a sacrificial victim on shipboard—"This imp, this Flibbertigibbet, was killing us by inches"—might possibly have suggested Conrad's Nigger of the "Narcissus."

The designation of a minor Marryat might well be conferred *Captain* on Frederick Chamier (1796-1870), author of *The Life of a Chamier Sailor* (1834), *Ben Brace of Nelson's "Agamemnon"* (1835), *The Saucy Arethusa* (1836), *Jack Adams* (1838), and *Tom Bowling* (1839). The humble task he set himself was to instil a knowledge of naval history through the medium of entertaining stories, and in the truth and exactitude of his accounts of events he excelled his master. For such a task he was well fitted. He entered the navy in 1809, and retired from active service in 1827, going through the miserable Walcheren expedition and seeing a good deal of the American war. Personal experience and information acquired at first-hand qualified him to continue James's *Naval History*, from the siege of Algiers in 1816 to the battle of Navarino in 1827. As to the great war of the antecedent period, he could fight all the important actions over again, even duels between frigates being described with a wealth of authenticated detail, only slightly altered in date and scene. His usual method was to dovetail the careers of several distinguished seamen and make a composite hero, such as Tom Bowling, who rises from the lowest to the highest rank under Nelson and Collingwood. The only blot upon Chamier's portrait is that he provides Tom with an aristocratic pedigree, sharing Marryat's foible for discovering the long-lost sons of peers. *Ben Brace*, however, is a study in autobiographical form of

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Nelson's devoted servant Allen, and the book recites the deeds of the great admiral with the accuracy and vigour of an eye-witness, though Ben's family history is melodramatic with a vengeance. Chamier was a crotchety person, and now and then strikes out a racy character of his own stamp. His salt-water yarns are excellent, but he becomes hackneyed and ridiculous when romance leads him ashore.<sup>1</sup>

*Minor  
historical  
novelists*

The public gets the kind of novels and novelists that it deserves, if sometimes far better than it deserves. James' and Ainsworth's vogue was a signal example of the result when that which passes for criticism flatters uncritical readers. Novelists who had other distinctions were carried away by the prevailing taste for historical fiction. Bulwer-Lytton will have to be considered immediately; the historical excursions of the Irish novelists have already been noticed; even such writers as Dickens and Thackeray could not abstain from this tempting bypath, and in *Esmond* Thackeray produced a masterpiece which stands almost alone among historical novels. Two who kept to the fashion set by G. P. R. James and Harrison Ainsworth were Emma Robinson and George Herbert Bonaparte Rodwell (1800-1852). Miss Robinson's *Whitefriars, or the Court of Charles II* (1844), follows Ainsworth closely and Scott at a distance. The general picture of Restoration London and the thieves' paradise of Alsatia owes a good deal to *The Fortunes of Nigel*, but the neo-Gothic colouring is much more like Ainsworth's. Her *Whitehall, or the Days of Charles I* (1845), and *Westminster Abbey* (1859), are less successful efforts in the same style. She wrote others, including a *Cæsar Borgia* (1853). Rodwell's *Old London Bridge, a Romance of the Sixteenth Century* (1849), handled the same theme as Anne Manning's more sedate *Colloquies of Edward Osborne*, the London apprentice who founded the ducal house of Leeds, in the very manner of Harrison Ainsworth. But Miss Manning and also her predecessor Miss Rathbone

<sup>1</sup> There is mention of Chamier's services in Sir William Laird Clowes' *History of the Royal Navy*; and, what is more important, the implicit truth of many prominent incidents narrated by him can be verified from those pages. Lieutenant Richard Bowen (1761-1797) and Commander Temple Hardy, rather impertinently identified later with Nelson's captain, Sir Thomas Masterman Hardy, were the principal components in the case of Tom Bowling.

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belong to a different school, whose consideration had better be deferred. A novelist who stood for conscientious history with only enough romance to make things move was Charles Macfarlane (1799-1858), whose rendering of the story of Hereward, *The Camp of Refuge* (1844), the picture of the anarchy under Stephen in *A Legend of Reading Abbey* (1845), and the reminiscence of a sad episode in *The Dutch in the Medway* (1845), are admirable in a modest way. A humble local novelist, Thomas Miller (1807-1874), "the Basket-maker of Nottingham," made respectable use of Sherwood Forest lore, in *Royston Gower, or the Days of King John* (1838), and of his fellowship with the Nottinghamshire rustic, in *Gideon Giles the Roper* (1840), which relates to the Chartist period. Then *Leonard Lyndsay, or the Story of a Buccaneer* (1850), by Angus Bethune Reach (1831-1856), was a not undistinguished paragon of a busy young journalist. Even the serious-minded Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), author of the famous *Illustrations of Political Economy*, when she took the offensive against slavery chose an historical subject, the career of Toussaint l'Ouverture. In *The Hour and the Man* (1840), Toussaint, exhibited as a phoenix of virtue and magnanimity, and contrasted with the sordid and inhuman whites as violently as Mrs Behn's Oroonoko, is the Man, and the blood-stained black revolution in Hayti marks the Hour; but history is warped to serve propaganda. Miss Martineau's other fiction belongs to the light literature of the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge—not too light for that strenuously utilitarian age. Her nine volumes of *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-1834) and her *Illustrations of Taxation* (1834) served their purpose ably and conscientiously, and then were done with, as she was sensible and modest enough to recognize. They were school books for the man in the street rather than novels. In a plain, matter-of-fact account of what goes on in a small isolated community in the southern hemisphere, she expounds Ricardo's theory of rent, the doctrine of value as created by labour, and the whole economy of the industrial system, with the virtues that benefit the individual through his place in the community. The Malthusian theorem is

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similarly illustrated, with the folly of defying economic law, by strikes and the like. It was all severely abstract and utilitarian; and in later life she admitted compunction for the lack of sentiment, the heartlessness of a science which "is no science at all, strictly speaking."<sup>1</sup> But, before she reached that complete change of outlook, she wrote several stories stamped with less of the official educator's peculiar emphasis. *Deerbrook* (1839), on the model of *Our Village*, draws an Edgeworthian moral from the jealousies and disputes of two neighbouring families. *The Playfellow* (1841) is a set of readable tales for children, and comprises such well-known items as "Feats on the Fiord" and "The Crofton Boys," the latter, especially, not inferior to Miss Edgeworth in its quiet, homely cogency.

*Lytton*

The bulk of the very miscellaneous work of Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873) must be left for another chapter. He experimented with every known variety of fiction; and with his acute sense of what was fashionable, and what would be expected of one holding his position among novelists, he was not likely to neglect historical romance. He produced half-a-dozen definitely historical novels, besides several on the border-line but classifiable elsewhere. Except the first, *Devereux*, they were acclaimed as at least equal to the finest contemporary efforts of their kind. Lytton possessed, at any rate, one of the attributes of genius, the art of taking pains; his historical novels would alone prove that. He had withdrawn *Falkland* (1827), when he found that no one liked his revised code of morals; had dazzled the world with the dandified *Pelham* (1828), and overwhelmed it with the counterfeit metaphysics of *The Disowned* (1829), in four thick volumes, when he brought out *Devereux* before the end of the year. The critic in *The Examiner* had pointed out that *Pelham* had been written by Bulwer "for his own pleasure," but "*The Disowned* for his bookseller."<sup>2</sup> The two aims were balanced perhaps in *Devereux*; historical romance for a rising market and a most congenial subject for Bulwer. He said in the

<sup>1</sup> See an excellent account of Miss Martineau by Louis Cazamian (*Le Roman social en Angleterre* (1904), pp. 93-110).

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, by his Grandson, i. 349.

dedication to John Auldjo, "I wished to portray a man flourishing in the last century, with the train of mind and sentiment peculiar to the present." The autobiographical form was singularly appropriate, though it laid bare the author's inability to do anything more than project himself into the personages conjured up. Devereux is a friend or at least a contemporary of Count Anthony Hamilton, Bishop Huet, the Abbé de Chaulieu, and Boulainvilliers; Voltaire is present at the Meeting of Wits. It is the time of Swift, Steele and Addison, Pope and Colley Cibber, the Colonel Cleland who was said to be Will Honeycomb's original,<sup>1</sup> Beau Fielding, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the Duke of Wharton, and, for Bulwer above all, of Bolingbroke. Necessarily, it is a costume novel: London terrorized by the Mohawks, Paris and Versailles in the Augustan age, and St Petersburg under Peter the Great, are learnedly delineated, with the manners of high society, the current ideas and sentiments, and the politics of the time and place. Bulwer worked hard at the local colour, and was almost too conscientious in his chronological exactitude; whatever invention he had was cramped; and it was only his personal enthusiasm for that age and for Bolingbroke its representative that gives the book any interest. The public did not respond to his enthusiasm.

*Eugene Aram* (1832) had better stand over for consideration "*The* with the other unorthodox study of a criminal, *Paul Clifford* <sup>*Days of Pompeii*</sup> *Last* (1830); the history in it is entirely subordinate to the casuistry. But a tour in Italy and the usual course of reading brought forth two elaborate reconstructions of past ages, *The Last* <sup>*and*</sup> *Days of Pompeii* (1834) and *Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes* (1835), both half finished before he re-landed in England. Lytton said that a painting of the destruction of Pompeii seen at the Brera, when he was passing through Milan, gave him the first idea of the former,<sup>2</sup> which was not so much a version of history as a picture of the famous city at the height of its splendour, dissolving into the terrific spectacle of its sudden annihilation. In the preface, he congratulates himself

<sup>1</sup> See Volume V. 45-46.

<sup>2</sup> Sadleir, 367.



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on not having brought in any historical characters, and on having left Rome on one side as too well known, and concentrated on the voluptuous pleasure-city. He shows himself not less well satisfied with the learning he has acquired for the occasion. This is indeed considerable. But the result of his strenuous application is that the novel is clogged with bookishness, rather than vivified with the easy familiarity of an imaginative scholar, like Scott. It is a piece of baroque architecture, verging dangerously upon the rococo. Lytton was always hampered by ideas of the dignity of literature such as never entered Scott's head. Here he is at his loftiest, as well as more anxious even than in *Devereux* to exhibit his scholarship. Temples, palaces, streets and the figures crowding them, costumes and manners, sports and amusements, including the brutalities of the amphitheatre, religious rites and the wildest superstitions, witchcraft and Egyptian sorcery, are depicted with a brush heavy with colour. The early Church and the simple piety of the Christians are contrasted with the worldliness and cynicism of the educated in their attitude to the official beliefs. Such themes, too, as the worship of Isis appealed to Lytton's mystical bent, and evoked Hugoesque visions of heaven and hell. But it is a factitious, galvanic life that informs all this. Sensation, and especially horror, do duty for tragedy and sublimity. There is pathos in the study of the blind slave Nydia, but pathos over-prepared. There is a plot; and, at the crucial moments, premonitory earthquakes and then the final catastrophe serve as the agents of poetic justice. In this, and not this work alone, one can see the man who thought John Martin "the most original genius of his age" trying to produce similar effects of multitudinous splendours overwhelmed in gigantic cataclysms. But both distinguished opinion and the mob of readers were in ecstasies; and with confidence braced by success Lytton completed the other novel, *Rienzi*, which was to rival Scott's Continental romances. This is an equally elaborate picture of Rome and Florence at the epoch when Cola di Rienzi fought in vain for Italian freedom and unity, and the stormy politics of that episode

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furnish excitements falling not far short of those in the preceding novel. But, as to any contest with Scott, Lytton was hardly in the lists with him. In *Leila* (1838), a romance of the conquest of Granada, his pretensions were more modest.

After *Night and Morning* and *Zanoni* he returned to historical "The fiction in *The Last of the Barons* (1843) and *Harold, or the Last of the Saxon Kings* (1848), and no doubt experienced much satisfaction in having beaten Harrison Ainsworth on his own ground, for Ainsworth also plumed himself on his learning, had tried to rival *Paul Clifford* in *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard*, and was too like Lytton in his talents and his mannerisms to be agreeable. As to Scott, Lytton's best, and these are certainly his best in the historical vein, do not come within measurable distance of Scott's average. Lytton attains a sort of lifelikeness, a surface accuracy, an avoidance of anachronisms; but only a mechanical likeness to life, never that touch of the indefinable which seems a transfusion of life itself. In reading him, one keeps thinking oneself in a large library, provided with all the books available in Lytton's day, and asking from time to time why he followed this authority rather than that, in accepting or rejecting a tradition, in the turn of a scene, or the cut of a personage. The notes at the end look very like Scott's, but are less useful for enlightening the reader than as vouchers for Lytton's vaunted researches before writing. He explained in *Harold* that his intentions were different from Scott's; he preferred to extract romantic interest from "History itself"; in other words, he proposed "to employ Romance in the service of History." This is a legitimate enterprise, though difficult; but when Lytton, who had had to acquire information on an unfamiliar subject, ventured into the field of controversy, and contested points with the regular historian, he put himself into a ridiculous position. The historical novelist who takes his duty to history so conscientiously is on safer ground when he recognizes himself as simply and solely an illustrator; that is a function in which he can be of real service.

*The Last of the Barons* is a good epical narrative of the central events in the Wars of the Roses, with only a moderate

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Two  
similar  
studies of  
history

admixture of romance. It strikes the right epical note; and Lytton chose a hero whom he could both admire and love,<sup>1</sup> and who actually was the foremost agent in the historical transactions. His Edward IV and Richard Crookback, Hastings, the Lady Anne, and other historical personages, are carefully if not brilliantly drawn, and the long account of the battle of Barnet is good narrative. Less satisfactory are his efforts to interpret, in a manner supposed to be philosophical, the social changes and tendencies of the epoch. The dual plot enables him to bring in such semi-historical figures as the necromantic Friar Bungay, with his heroine Sybil and her love affairs, and her father, the man of science and the inventor, execrated by the mob as a wizard, and thus doubly typical of the age. Historical personages take a still more commanding part in *Harold*, which is also a reconstruction of life in a given era like *The Last Days of Pompeii*.<sup>2</sup> Lytton follows Scott in the scene introducing the half-legendary Taillefer and the very substantial Lanfranc; Taillefer chanting his Ballad of Rou and thundering war, and Lanfranc insinuating policy, make a contrast significant of the final issue. The protagonists are of course the unfortunate Harold and the ruthless William of Normandy, and the familiar story has simply to be amplified and rationalized; which Lytton does by making love a decisive factor in affairs of State, a device nearly always avoided by Scott. Harold's affection for Edith, and his innocent hope that after the Confessor's death the Pope will grant him a dispensation to marry within the forbidden ties, are motives skilfully woven into the historical fabric. On the other hand, Lytton's handling of the business between William and Matilda and the impediments preferred by the Church to their union is only a more romantic version of actual history. But, as it is all fiction and meant for the common reader, some characters must engross sympathy, others not; and, if any of the former meet with misfortune, they must be shown to be more or less responsible for the

<sup>1</sup> "I am glad you like Warwick at last," he wrote to a friend, "I love him!" (*Life of Bulwer*, by his Grandson, ii. 53.)

<sup>2</sup> *Harold* was written, "in an incredibly short space of time," immediately after the completion of the long epic poem *King Arthur* (*Life*, by his Grandson, ii. 97).

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poetic justice which befalls them. Some such considerations have to be invoked to justify such a caricature of religiosity as Lytton's Edward the Confessor; or the guilelessness of Harold, otherwise so sage and statesmanlike, when after William has shown his hand he remains so unsuspecting, that "it could never enter into his head that William . . . could himself aspire to the English crown."<sup>1</sup> Lytton obviously did not escape the pitfalls lying in wait for the romancer who attempts a new interpretation of events. The method of Scott was safer; or, if that was beyond him, it would have been wise to stick to the plan he had followed in resuscitating the glories of Pompeii.<sup>2</sup>

Approximately of the same stamp as Lytton's were the *L.E.L.* historical romances of that unfortunate and much-maligned *and* woman, Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838) and of the *Whyte-*sporting novelist Whyte-Melville. *L.E.L.* wrote all sorts of *Melville* things, narrative and miscellaneous poems, of an emotional, melodious but unchastened order, tales and sketches for the albums and keepsakes, criticism for Jerdan's *Literary Gazette* and other periodicals, and some novels. Of these the best was *Ethel Churchill, or the Two Brides* (1837), a domestic story of the early Georges, bringing Sir Robert Walpole and others in among the fictitious characters. A more accomplished woman and a minor poetess, who lived long in France and wrote learnedly and gracefully on the country and its history and literature, was Louisa Stuart Costello (1799-1870), known now for her admirable translations in *The Rose Garden of Persia* (1845), for she was also a Persian scholar. The best of several historical novels from her pen was *The Queen-Mother* (1841). George James Whyte-Melville (1821-1878) was a popular exponent of sporting fiction, a rival of Surtees who went to school to Thackeray, but who also took lessons from Lytton of *The Caxtons* in his *Captain Digby Grand* (1853). Like Lytton also, he was an opportunist; and after the

<sup>1</sup> Book VIII., chap. iv.

<sup>2</sup> Lytton began another classical romance, *Pausanias the Spartan*, which was finished by his son and published posthumously (1876). His Hellenic enthusiasm had been displayed long before in the historical study, *The Rise and Fall of Athens* (1827).

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Crimean War brought out a serial novel, *The Interpreter* (1858), ranging over Hungary, Turkey, and the Balkans; the doings of a beautiful agent of the Austrian Government and her lover being projected against the heroic fight of the Turks under Omar Pasha against the Russians on the Danube. Whyte-Melville had been a captain in the Coldstream Guards, and had served later with the Turkish army. *Holmby House* (1860), a Civil War novel, with a good-natured but inaccurate portrait of Cromwell<sup>1</sup>; *The Queen's Maries* (1864), one of the innumerable tales of Mary Queen of Scots; and *Cerise* (1866), concerning Louis XIV and the Regent Orleans, are in the established style of historical romancing inaugurated by Lytton and Harrison Ainsworth and improved by careful study of Dumas. *The Gladiators, a tale of Rome and Judæa* (1863), and *Sarchedon, a tale of the Great Queen* (1871), depict ancient Rome and Palestine and the deeds of Vitellius and Titus, and Egypt and Assyria under Semiramis, in the opulent manner of *The Last Days of Pompeii*. Whyte-Melville's best historical novel, however, and perhaps the finest thing he wrote, was *Katerfelto, a story of Exmoor* (1875), in which both sportsmanship and a liking for eighteenth-century manners had full swing. All the history that comes in is a slight connexion with Wilkes and the false alarm of a Jacobite rising. The young hero, after killing his man in a duel, gets into further peril of the law by robbing a nobleman who was carrying a warrant for the apprehension of certain disaffected persons. But the true hero is the horse Katerfelto, another Black Bess, named after the gipsy charlatan Katerfelto, who plays a melodramatic part. It is a rousing story such as Lytton could never tell, try as he might, in which the life of the road and the chase of the red deer are as rich ingredients as the fortunes of the adventurer loved by a lady of quality and by a beautiful gipsy—who gives her life to save him from the sheriff's officers hot in pursuit.

But long ere this date historical romance had become a

<sup>1</sup> "He stumbled into the pitfalls which always await the amateur historian, as when he made Cromwell drill the Ironsides according to the drill-book of 1842 instead of 1642, not apparently realizing that there was any difference between the two" (The Hon. Sir John Fortescue, on Whyte-Melville, in *The Eighteen-Sixties*, 232).

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regular article of commerce, a recognized form which every writer of fiction was expected to try. Inevitably, it had a formula of its own, and grew so hackneyed, that it would have gone to the dogs but for the new life infused by the romanticism of Blackmore, of William Morris, and of R. L. Stevenson—three sorts of romanticism contributing to the same work of restoration, as must be traced in detail later on.

## CHAPTER III

### PEACOCK, DISRAELI, LYTTON

*Historical reasons why these are grouped* It will appear, if it is not evident at once, why these three novelists are grouped together. The first two are obviously exponents of ideas and tendencies rather than disinterested story-tellers, and the third stands beside or somewhere below them in a number of his works, whilst in others he takes up this or that fashion of his day. But it is as much their unlikeness to the general run of novelists as any deeper relationship that renders it convenient to view them together. Their influence on one another was more considerable than is always recognized, greater indeed than their intrinsic affinity; though such influence came less through direct imitation than from their promptness in seizing and applying to their own purposes forms and methods that had been invented or revived and had gained a certain acceptance. The Lucianic fable and dialogue modernized by Anthony Hamilton, Voltaire, and Marmontel,<sup>1</sup> in the *conte*, and the serious or farcical discussion of questions of the day by characters in a sort of novel, proved as useful to Disraeli the politician as to Peacock the satirist; and Lytton, who tried all the available varieties of fiction, adopted a good many of their devices for his self-ascribed mission to challenge accepted morals, question laws, and expound his visions of the Real and the Ideal. Further, all three were no distant relatives of the Romantics,

<sup>1</sup> Saintsbury accidentally found confirmation of the view that Peacock was directly indebted to Marmontel when he noticed that "the beautiful Cephalis," in *Headlong Hall*, won for his bride by Mr Escot, came from the English version of *Les Mariages samnites* (Introduction to *Maid Marian and Crotchet Castle*, 1895, p. viii.). Anticipations of the Peacockian tale can be found also in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Pigault-Lebrun, and as Van Doren points out (78-79) in George Walker's *Vagabond* (1799) and Isaac D'Israeli's *Vaurien* (1797), and *Flim-Flam* (1805). Fielding, Swift, and also Goldsmith and other authors of "Oriental" stories contributed to the tradition followed by Peacock and Disraeli.

Disraeli and Lytton beyond any possible mistake, even if Peacock's attitude of a bantering elder brother often seems to belie it.

Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866) divided a long span of *Peacock* life between scholarly reclusion and an able official career in the East India Company's service, to which he was appointed with three other men of exceptional talent, including James Mill, in 1819. He held his post till 1856, being promoted to the chief examinership of Indian correspondence in 1836: John Stuart Mill succeeded on his retirement. The scholar and man of letters proved a first-rate man of business; and it is pleasing to remember that it was the author of *Nightmare Abbey* and *Crotchet Castle* who projected and organized the first service of iron steamships round the Cape.<sup>1</sup> During this period his writing was in abeyance, though not his reading and scholarship, which sometimes gave him a professional advantage that surprised his colleagues. Peacock was one of those who have excelled in learning without having had a university education. He was at work as a clerk at the age of fourteen. Having, however, won a prize for literature, he was presently allowed to pursue his studies on lines of his own. Naturally, he always scoffed at everything academic. Sir Telegraph Paxarett, in *Melincourt*, "had some learning, when he went to college; but he was cured of it before he came away. Great, indeed, must be the zeal for improvement which an academical education cannot extinguish."<sup>2</sup>

It was his intellectual accomplishments and literary repute, *Contact* for he had by now published some minor verse, as much as *with* his being a neighbour, that led to Peacock's intimacy, some *Shelley* years before the India Office engulfed him, with Shelley and the Bracknell circle; incidentally, he is one of the chief witnesses on the imbroglio with Mary and Harriet. Though

<sup>1</sup> It was afterwards, in *Gryll Grange*, that he made Dr Opimian, who is as like himself as Dr Folliott was thirty years ago, in holding forth to Mrs Opimian on the follies of the age, instance ships with high-pressure steam-boilers and perhaps not "faithfully built and efficiently manned" among the agencies causing accidents which are really crimes. We may be sure that Peacock's ships were well found, and did not sacrifice to "the insane passion of the public for speed" (vii.).

<sup>2</sup> vii. Cp. xiii. on the University's "deep-laid conspiracy against the human understanding."



he was several years older than the poet, they both did something to fertilize each other's brains, tangible evidence of which fact are Shelley's letters from Switzerland and Italy to Peacock and the recipient's long and much better poem, *Rhododaphne*. It has been said, with evident probability, that *The Four Ages of Poetry* had little other purpose than to bait Shelley; assuredly, Peacock would never have stood by some of his own pronouncements in that effusion. He will always be pardoned, however, for having provoked such a deathless retort as *The Defence of Poetry*. They went touring together, and talking vigorously on anything and everything that concerns the pursuit of letters. Peacock had lately been tramping in Wales, where he had met and fallen in love with the girl whom he was to propose to and marry eight years later, apparently after being rejected by another lady in the interim.<sup>1</sup> Now he went with the Shelleys to Edinburgh, and then on an excursion up the Thames. He stayed with Shelley, discussed the latter's projects, and criticized both his works and his theories. It may well have been that in reasoning with Shelley, shaking him out of his extravagances, and mocking at his too enthusiastic ideals, Peacock became conscious of the wrong direction he had himself taken in the affectations and grandiloquence of *The Philosophy of Melancholy* and the romantic sentimentality of his other early verse. In discussing poetry with Shelley he realized his own powers of critical insight, and perhaps found exercise for unsuspected gifts of irony and sarcasm. His next published work, *Sir Proteus* (1814), which he signed "P. M. O'Donovan, Esq.," was a mock-ballad hitting at most of the literary luminaries of the day; and he must have been engaged about the same time or soon after on the three comedies, *The Dilettanti*, *The Circle of Loda*, and *The Three Doctors*, which were not to see the light till nearly a century later, but ideas and tricks of character from which went into the novels *Headlong Hall* and *Melincourt*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to H. F. B. Brett-Smith (*Works of Peacock*, i.—Biographical introduction).

<sup>2</sup> See introduction by A. B. Young to *The Plays of T. L. Peacock, published for the first time* (1910).

Contact with a real poet opened Peacock's eyes. He saw *Attitude* Shelley's faults, and he perceived only too gleefully the *to the* deficiencies in Shelley's contemporaries. But the result was *Romantic* to refine his taste without impairing his belief in what he considered sound in romantic poetry. He refined it to the point of a crotchety fastidiousness, and was prone to discover faults that did not exist. Perhaps, however, it is not visionary to regard Peacock as Romanticism reflecting upon itself and mocking at its own excesses and vagaries, just as Scott's common sense reacted to his own wilder flights.<sup>1</sup> Peacock was no slave even to a thing he respected so much as common sense, and consistently denounced many things that passed for it, such as utilitarianism, the gospel of progress, trust in mechanical kinds of education. He remained a poet and a Romantic, even when he was chastizing the Romantics. *Rhododaphne* is not a great poem, but it is poetry; the fragment "Calidore" and numberless passages in his novels consist of prose that no one but a poet could have written; and there is no gainsaying the high quality of the ballads and lyrics scattered throughout the same books. Even the drinking songs are far from being mere conviviality and defiance. Two stories, *Maid Marian* and *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, are the romance which is at least half poetry; and the settings of the less fantastic novels, the mountain dales of *Headlong Hall* and *Melincourt*, the melancholy strip between sea and fen of *Nightmare Abbey*, the flowery meads, old beech-woods, and pellucid chalk-streams of *Crotchet Castle*, and the skirts of the New Forest in *Gryll Grange*, are the choice of no anti-romantic. Peacock often employed the formalities of romantic fiction in irony, as in the batch of weddings that usually ends even his most satirical story. He was an ironist with a jovial humour, who could enjoy folly and excess whilst laughing at the same. He could be true to the romantic creed, at any rate his version of it, though he was lynx-eyed for the narrowness and bigotry with which some of the leading exponents repressed their own finer impulses, for fear of violating rules which they had too dogmatically laid down. His butt was not simply

<sup>1</sup> See Volume VI., chap. ix., especially p. 219.

Romanticism, not Romanticism in itself, but the fallacies into which its theorists were always tumbling, and all the dull absurdities of that era which they failed to cure, the concomitants if not the legitimate offspring of Romanticism: the perfectibilist craze and its opposite, deteriorationism, the vaunted diffusion of popular culture, or, as Dr Folliott called it, "the March of Mind," the one-idea'd theorists, the mystery-mongers and pessimists, cranks and prigs, quacks and hypocrites. He could satirize Whigs and Radicals, or Tories and reactionaries, the *Edinburgh* or the *Quarterly Review*. Peacock was the Aristophanes of a golden age of poetry which was also an age abounding in folly. Often he approached Rabelais' fantastic humour, which Friar Michael eulogizes in *Maid Marian*<sup>1</sup>; but "the genius of thoughtful laughter" which informs his quieter comedies is nearer to Molière.<sup>2</sup> His method was to let his characters anatomize themselves without knowing that they were shamelessly exposing their insides. His own criterion was "the comic tales of Voltaire," in which "the ridicule is never sought; it always appears."<sup>3</sup> Hence he never thrusts himself into the picture, though Dr Opimian and Dr Folliott both speak with the same kind of voice; and his point of view is so independent that he has been doubtfully described as a sort of Liberal-Conservative. His attitude to the age altered inevitably with the changes of the world: at one time he satirized conservatism and reaction; at another, progress, of the mechanical

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xvii.

<sup>2</sup> "The first-born of common sense, the vigilant Comic, which is the genius of thoughtful laughter," Meredith's *Essay on Comedy and the uses of the Comic Spirit* (1897, p. 62). Peacock is nowhere mentioned in this famous work of his son-in-law, yet it is largely an exposition of the spirit of Peacock. And Dr Middleton, in *The Egoist*, a novel penetrated with the same spirit, seems a blend of Peacock with those choice creations of his, Dr Opimian and Dr Folliott. That central saying, "Comedy is the Fountain of sound sense," and the amplification, "Philosopher and Comic poet are of a cousinship in the eye they cast on life: and they are equally unpopular with our wilful English of the hazy region and the ideal that is not to be disturbed," are richly illustrated by the novels of Peacock.

<sup>3</sup> Carl van Doren (*Life of Peacock*, 205) quotes from an article by Peacock in which he contrasts the highest order of comic fiction with "that which makes ridiculous things not really so, by throwing over them a fool's coat which does not belong to them," etc. He goes on: "Ridicule, in the first case, the honest development of the ridiculous *ab intrâ*, is very justly denominated the test of truth: but ridicule, in the second case, the dishonest superinduction of the ridiculous *ab extrâ*, is the test of nothing but the knavery of the inventor."

kind. A healthy disgust with most established things is the mark of a satirist; but Peacock was no pessimist or deteriorationist, and he fully believed that comedy was, as his son-in-law later put it, "the fountain of sound sense," and that its function was to serve civilization by purifying intelligence.

Peacock wrote seven novels, two of them romances, and "Head-  
five typified by the first, *Headlong Hall* (1816): little comedies<sup>long</sup>  
or farces, staged in a country house, where such a host *Hall*"  
as Squire Headlong has collected a party of men of letters and what the French call *philosophes*—theorists, reformers, agitators, faddists—who talk and refute each other, sometimes by physical arguments when abstract logic fails, and in their lighter moments recite poetry and doggerel and sing those bacchanalian verses which are so much superior to the formal compositions in Peacock's volumes dedicated to the muse. Here, for example, occur the song, "In his last bin Sir Peter lies," the glee, "A heeltap! a heeltap!" and the inimitable chorus, "Hail to the Headlong!" There is rarely more in the five novels than the pretence of a plot, for romantic plots are among the things to be laughed at. Plot and machinery in a novel are quickly forgotten; in Peacock, it is only the droll situations that matter; how they are led up to no one remembers. In short, these are mock versions of conventional fiction, the intricacies and surprises of which are condensed into the plotlets for the sake of poking fun and giving each burlesque the official stamp. In *Headlong Hall* there is not even that much, but only talk on the way to or at the house, except the playful romance of the rejected lover who saves the father's life, and the spate of marriages at the conclusion. Peacock sketches in a paragraph the four illuminati who are his protagonists:

These four persons were, Mr Foster, the perfectibilian; Mr Escot, the deteriorationist; Mr Jenkison, the statu-quo-ite; and the Reverend Doctor Gaster, who, though of course neither a philosopher nor a man of taste, had so won on the Squire's fancy, by a learned dissertation on the art of stuffing a turkey, that he concluded no Christmas party would be complete without him.

The Greek etymologies of all these gentlemen's names appear in footnotes. Some of the personal features and some of the speeches are borrowed from Peacock's Welsh play, *The Three Doctors*, as *Melincourt* afterwards drew upon *The Dilettanti*. But the characters in this novel are little more than representatives of current manias, fixed opinions, amusing idiosyncrasies. Peacock may have got their germs from the reviews; but he did not fail to make them talk naturally and behave in character. The figures in his later novels show more personality; some of them remain indeed among our most cherished intimacies. But for his comedy of ideas a contrary method to that of regular fiction was more suitable; and in the most human of his characters, even in those drawn from living models, their import as factors in an equation came foremost, and was indicated by such names as Mr Toogood, Mr Toobad, Mr Listless, Mr Mystic, Mr Feathernest, and so on. Even the characters in which there was a large basis of realism are "stamped in the idea."<sup>1</sup> Thus the wrong done to Shelley or Coleridge, Malthus or Gifford, in the absurdities or worse attributed to Scythrop, Mr Flosky, Mr Fax, and Mr Vamp, disappears or is greatly mitigated when it is realized that the alleged portraits are only personifications of those doctrines and professed motives of theirs which he isolated for the purposes of an allegory—and that is what it comes to.<sup>2</sup> It was skittish, it looked almost scurrilous, to jibe at Scott as Mr Derrydown, who "found, or fancied he found, in the plain language of the old English ballad, glimpses of the truth of things, which he had vainly sought in the vast volumes of philosophical disquisition," and, in consequence of this luminous discovery, "proceeded to lock up his library, purchase

<sup>1</sup> Meredith said of Molière, "He did not paint in raw realism. He seized his characters firmly for the central purpose of the play, stamped them in the idea," etc. He might very well have been discussing Peacock.

<sup>2</sup> As to the place of opinion in satirical literature Peacock wrote: "Cervantes, Rabelais, Swift, Voltaire, Fielding, have led fancy against opinion with a success that no other names can parallel. Works of mere amusement that teach nothing may have an accidental and transient success, but cannot of course have influence on their own times, and will certainly not pass to posterity" (quoted by Van Doren, 135-136). Peacock goes on to point out that it is a mistake to think that Scott teaches nothing. He is a painter of manners, he teaches history, and "he offers materials to the philosopher" on a state of society comparatively little known.

a travelling chariot, and pass the greater part of his time posting about the country, for the purpose, as he expressed it, of studying together poetry and the peasantry, unsophisticated nature and the truth of things." If Scott was intended, it was not Scott who was hit, but the daft collector who plodded doggedly in Scott's footsteps.<sup>1</sup>

The real machinery of his stories is the brisk, pithy, and incisive dialogue, to which is imparted an ironic twist that bars the satire. It is not perfectly lifelike dialogue, and has little of the easy flow of colloquial speech. There is not a word wasted; the sentences seem cut in crystal,<sup>2</sup> though Peacock's conversations have no other likeness to the monumental dialogues of Landor. On the whole, even as a stream of incident, the word-contests were much more effective than the prankish behaviour in the farcical episodes.

*Melincourt* (1817) and the last Peacock was to write, *Gryll* "*Melincourt*" (1860), are longer than any of the rest and rather more like anyone else's novels, although in this case the orang-outang hero, through whom he makes merry both with Lord Monboddos's doctrines of man's evolution from the ape and with the primitivism of Rousseau, does considerable violence to the regulation pattern. This Gulliverian episode with the uproarious election for Onevote compensates, however, for the somewhat dull and strangely acrimonious satire in the disputations of another talkative house-party. Our satirist was to be fully as personal in his hits in *Nightmare Abbey*; but there he was going to ridicule those he loved "without loving them less,"<sup>3</sup> in other words, there was to be more humour than derision; whilst here the prevailing temper, except in the farcical doings of Sir Oran Haut-ton, is that of Mr Sarcastic, generally recognized as a tactless intrusion of the author himself.<sup>4</sup> Peacock was never more unfair than

<sup>1</sup> *Melincourt*, viii. The allusion in *The Four Ages* seems to confirm that Peacock meant Scott: "Mr Scott digs up the poachers and cattle-stealers of the ancient border"—to show how much finer and more interesting from the poetical point of view was the past than the present.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Elton says admirably: "There is the true air of impromptu, only no misses are allowed" (*Survey*, 1780-1830, i. 381).

<sup>3</sup> Meredith on *Comedy*, 78.

<sup>4</sup> *E.g.* by Saintsbury and Mr Priestley.

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in sneering at Wordsworth as Mr Paperstamp of Mainchance Villa, Southey as Mr Feathernest and in *Crotchet Castle* as Mr Sackbut,<sup>1</sup> and Coleridge as Mr Mystic of Cimmerian Lodge, though the last of these falls flat from very clumsiness, and cannot compare with the later appearances of Coleridge as Mr Flosky and Mr Skionar. Mr Vamp may be allowed to pass for Gifford, Mr Killthedeadead for Croker, and Mr Anyside Antijack for Canning, without protest though without entire approval. So also Mr Fax, who is evidently to be accepted as a burlesque of Malthus, and is described by Mr Forester as "the champion of calm reason, the indefatigable explorer of the cold clear springs of knowledge, the bearer of the torch of dispassionate truth, that gives more light than warmth." He duly enunciates his theory that population tends to increase beyond the means of subsistence, and his corrective, birth-control:

"The remedy is an universal social compact, binding both sexes to equally rigid celibacy, till the prospect of maintaining the average number of six children be as clear as the arithmetic of futurity can make it."

But it is refreshing to turn from the arid hypotheses of Mr Fax to the more Peacockian subject of Mr Portpipe's philosophy of drinking:

"There are two reasons for drinking: one is, when you are thirsty, to cure it; the other, when you are not thirsty, to prevent it. The first is obvious, mechanical, and plebeian; the second is most refined, abstract, propicient, and canonical. I drink by anticipation of thirst that may be. Prevention is better than cure. Wine is the elixir of life. 'The soul,' says St Augustine, 'cannot live in drought.'<sup>2</sup> What is death? Dust and ashes. There is nothing so dry. What is life? Spirit. What is Spirit? Wine."

The best of the fun comes in, however, with the illustrious monkey. Peacock exercises the greatest tact in putting Sir Oran Haut-ton through his paces, slyly evading all the

<sup>1</sup> Alluding to the butt of sack which was among his perquisites in the office of Poet Laureate.

<sup>2</sup> "Anima certe, quia spiritus est, in sicco habitare non potest" (Peacock's gloss).

impossibilities. Having the game in his own hands, he keeps to situations in which the well-trained anthropoid conducts himself in a probable manner, granted the initial circumstances. The absurdities kept out of sight, the rest of it is quite plausible. Sir Oran's strength and faultless courtesy make him an excellent hero; he always behaves like a gentleman, though he never opens his lips. He is a stalwart champion of the right, a doughty rescuer of distressed damsels, and the agent of poetic justice on more occasions than one. And he is a perfect master of the retort courteous:

Lord Anophel now came up, and surveyed Sir Oran through his quizzing-glass, who, making him a polite bow, took his quizzing-glass from him, and examined him through it in the same manner. Lord Anophel flew into a furious passion; but receiving a gentle hint from Mr Hippy, that the gentleman to whom he was talking had just pulled up a pine, he deemed it prudent to restrain his anger within due bounds.

Peacock in this novel indulges in a radical's satire of an obsolete regime, though he was no lover of the mob. It is risky to identify him with any party; but the ironical bearing of the Tory invective put in the mouth of the "plump and portly divine" is clear enough:

"There is a Jacobin rascal in this town, who says it is a bad sign when the children die before the parent, and that a day of reckoning must come sooner or later for the old lady as well as for her daughters; but myself and my brother magistrates have taken measures for him, and shall soon make the town of Gullgudgeon too hot to hold him, as sure as my name is Peppertoast."

As Mr Hippy says, in this very novel, it is "pleasant enough to show a man his own picture, and make him damn the ugly rascal"; but this is damning in a different way. The Jacobin Mr Lookout takes up the cudgels against one of Peacock's favourite aversions, paper money, on which a little later he was to indite his rather feeble *Paper-money Lyrics*. Mr Lookout had warned Farmer Sheepshead against the paper promises of "Measter Hophthetwig and his gang," and



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recommends him to have one of the notes framed and glazed "as a warning to your children, and your children's children for ever."

"Do you hear him?" said the Rev. Mr Peppertoast; "do you hear the Jacobin rascal? Do you hear the libellous, seditious, factious, levelling, revolutionary, republican, democratical, atheistical villain?"

Obviously, Mr Peppertoast is the Tory in this novel, not Peacock. The election for Onevote might have been a humorous illustration of Burke's diatribe on Old Sarum, "where the representatives, more in number than the constituents, only serve to inform us that this was once a place of trade, and sounding with 'the busy hum of men,' though now you can only trace the streets by the colour of the corn, and its sole manufacture is in members of Parliament." Mr Sarcastic's address to Mr Christopher Corporate, the sole registered voter, does not fall short of this as a logical argument:

"Free, fat, and dependent burgess of this ancient and honourable borough! I stand forward an unworthy candidate, to be the representative of so important a personage, who comprises in himself a three-hundredth part of the whole elective capacity of this extensive empire. For if the whole population be estimated at eleven millions, with what awe and veneration must I look on one who is, as it were, the abstract and quintessence of thirty-three thousand six hundred and sixty-six people! The voice of Stentor was like the voice of fifty, and the voice of Harry Gill was like the voice of three<sup>1</sup>; but what are these to the voice of Mr Christopher Corporate, which gives utterance in one breath to the concentrated power of thirty-three thousand six hundred and sixty-six voices? Of such an one it may indeed be said, that *he is himself an host*, and that *none but himself can be his parallel*."

"Night-  
mare  
Abbey" There is no Mr Sarcastic in the next story, *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), where the merriment is of a friendly and playful kind. Shelley confessed that he enjoyed Scythrop, though he could

<sup>1</sup> A quip at the expense of Wordsworth's lyrical ballad, "Goody Blake and Harry Gill":

"His voice was like the voice of three."

not help recognizing his views of the world and some of his personal history travestied in it; so it must have been anything but a damaging lampoon. Whether the original of Mr Glowry also kissed the rod that smote him is not on record. Yet Peacock was cruel enough to lift the veil from his friend's matrimonial entanglements, and rally him gently but mercilessly on his plight between Mary and Harriet. The plot here is that of Sheridan's *Rivals*, in which Captain Absolute resists the attractions of Lydia Languish simply because she is his father's choice.

"This is most unaccountable. When I told you in London that I had chosen a husband for you, you thought proper to run away from him; and now, to all appearance, you have run away to him."

"How, sir! was that your choice?"

"Precisely; and if he is yours too we shall be both of a mind, for the first time in our lives."

"He is not my choice, sir. This lady has a prior claim: I renounce him."

"And I renounce him," said Marionetta.

It is a plot at least as old as Congreve's *Incognita*,<sup>1</sup> where the complications are duplicated, yet hardly yield more fun than does the "transcendental eleutherarch's" dilemma between his two charmers. For here too the entertainment is doubled by the combination of general and particular satire. It is not merely Shelley in Scythrop, Coleridge in Mr Glowry, and Byron in Mr Cypress, but Romanticism and all its works that are made a laughing-stock.

Scythrop did not dare to mention the name of Marionetta; he trembled lest some unhappy accident should reveal it to Stella, though he scarcely knew what result to wish or anticipate, and lived in the double fever of a perpetual dilemma. He could not dissemble to himself that he was in love, at the same time, with two damsels of minds and habits as remote as the antipodes. The scale of predilection always inclined to the fair one who happened to be present; but the absent was never effectually outweighed, though the degrees of exaltation

<sup>1</sup> See Volume III. 104.

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and depression varied according to accidental variations in the outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual graces of his respective charmers. Passing and repassing several times a day from the company of the one to that of the other, he was like a shuttlecock between two battledores, changing its direction as rapidly as the oscillations of a pendulum, receiving many a hard knock on the cork of a sensitive heart, and flying from point to point on the feathers of a super-sublimated head. This was an awful state of things. He had now as much mystery about him as any romantic transcendentalist or transcendental romancer could desire. He had his esoterical and his exoterical love. He could not endure the thought of losing either of them, but he trembled when he imagined the possibility that some fatal discovery might deprive him of both. The old proverb concerning two strings to a bow gave him some gleams of comfort; but that concerning two stools occurred to him more frequently, and covered his forehead with a cold perspiration.<sup>1</sup>

The verses from Butler prefixed to the whole story give the keynote:

"There's a dark lantern of the spirit."

Romanticism is the dark lantern that suits the gloom of Nightmare Abbey and the black melancholy cultivated by its inmates, the mystery-mongering of Mr Glowry, and the despair in which Mr Cypress, shade of Lord Byron who had just published the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, finds the ultimate bliss. "How can we be cheerful with the devil among us?" exclaims Mr Toobad. "How can we be cheerful when our nerves are shattered?" rejoins Mr Listless. Scythrop and Mr Cypress chime in, and Mr Glowry ejaculates: "Let us all be unhappy together." It is Mr Hilary who tries to save the last relics of optimism with a catch; but, unfortunately, it is Mr Cypress who sings it.

"There is a fever of the spirit  
The brand of Cain's unresting doom,  
Which in the lone dark souls that bear it  
Glows like the lamp in Tullia's tomb."

None but a poet could have written such a parody; none

<sup>1</sup> Chap. x.

but Peacock could have penned the bacchanalian glee that immediately follows, from the lips of Mr Hilary and the Reverend Mr Larynx:

"Seamen three! what men be ye?"

with the chorus, in which even the woebegone join in:

"And our ballast is old wine;  
And your ballast is old wine."

After which, "Mr Cypress, having his ballast on board, stepped, the same evening, into his bowl, or travelling chariot, and departed to rake seas and rivers, lakes and canals, for the moon of ideal beauty." The anthology value of Peacock's songs must not be allowed to obscure the felicity with which they cap the salient points of the drama.

Mr Flosky is far the best of Peacock's four different im-*Cole-*personations of Coleridge, with his famous protest: "I pity *ridge*. the man who can see the connexion of his own ideas. Still more do I pity him, the connexion of whose ideas any other person can see." His disquisition on mystery, "the very key-stone of all that is beautiful in poetry, all that is sacred in faith, and all that is recondite in transcendental psychology," is excellent satire, especially as an effort to console Marionetta, who has been deploring Scythrop's recent air of mystery which has caused her great uneasiness. But the inimitable touch is in the stage whisper, "Mr Flosky suddenly stopped: he found himself unintentionally trespassing within the limits of common sense." It is difficult to conceive either him or the real Coleridge proposing a bumper, as he does to Mr Cypress, who is leaving his country, after having quarrelled with his wife and therefore absolved himself from all duty as a citizen:

*Mr Glowry.* You are leaving England, Mr Cypress. There is a delightful melancholy in saying farewell to an old acquaintance, when the chances are twenty to one against ever meeting again. A smiling bumper to a sad parting, and let us all be unhappy together.

*Mr Cypress (filling a bumper).* This is the only social habit that the disappointed spirit never unlearns.

"*Maid Marian*" *Maid Marian* (1822) and *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829) have at least this likeness to fiction in general, that they tell fairly consecutive stories. They are at once mock-romanticism and genuine romance—playful romance, with an undercurrent of satire on persistent human foibles, which becomes more insidious and more deadly in the second. The personages and the jovial outdoor spirit of *Maid Marian* recall the Sherwood chapters of *Ivanhoe*, which had appeared three years before; but Peacock wrote all but three chapters four years earlier, and there is no question of borrowing.<sup>1</sup> His Friar Michael is wrought out of the same traditionary material as Scott's Friar Tuck,<sup>2</sup> and being drawn at greater length is both a more considerable and a richer comic figure. He must be set beside the later Seithenyn and Dr Folliott as one of the very few of Peacock's creations that are neither caricatures nor vehicles of a covert intellectual meaning. If any such significance be demanded of the friar, he must be simply described as a living embodiment of the spirit of laughter, the unprepened, irresponsible laughter which stamps Peacock of the tribe of Rabelais.

"You are welcome to laugh if it so please you. None shall laugh in my company, though it be at my expense, but I will have my share of the merriment. The world is a stage, and life is a farce, and he that laughs most has most profit of the performance. The worst thing is good enough to be laughed at, though it be good for nothing else; and the best thing, though it be good for something else, is good for nothing better."<sup>3</sup>

In one scene, he announces himself as "the church militant of Sherwood," and his prowess, accurately assessed by the discomfited baron, "it takes nine fighting men to make a fighting friar," is substantiated in many a bout at quarter-staves. But he might just as well be called sense and mother-wit and not too much sobriety militant, so boisterously and

<sup>1</sup> Van Doren, 158.

<sup>2</sup> For the sources used in *Maid Marian*, see Elton's *Survey*, i. 452, and Van Doren, 160-162.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xvi.

often anachronistically does he maintain Peacock's views of propriety and natural justice.

"Punniest thou?" said the friar. "A heinous anti-christian offence. Why anti-christian? Because anti-catholic. Why anti-catholic? Because anti-roman. Why anti-roman? Because Carthaginian. Is not pun from Punic? *punica fides*: the very quintessential quiddity of bad faith: double-visaged: double-tongued. He that will make a pun will—I say no more. Fie on it."<sup>1</sup>

Friar and songs, and these taken together are the finest set in all Peacock's novels, save *Maid Marian* from being sheer frivolity; but a great deal of it is only brilliant pantomime, and the whole has the atmosphere of musical comedy. No wonder that Planché, with a few borrowed touches from *Ivanhoe* and other sources, was able to turn it into an opera, which had a fair run.<sup>2</sup>

The other mock-romance, *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829), "The though as pure extravaganza it outdoes *Maid Marian* and even *Mis-Sir Oran's* exploits in *Melincourt*, has more underlying serious-*fortunes* ness, and the cunningly premeditated satire catches its victims, <sup>of</sup> *Elphin*, not merely where they are most defenceless, but where they are too dazed to know they are hit. Notoriously, to read between the lines and endeavour to define the intellectual position of an ironist is a difficult and often an impossible task. Peacock is peculiarly elusive. He mocks at any absurdity that happens to cross his vision, or simply rejoices in it as a sop to his humour. To try to align him with any political party is futile: his politics were not even eclectic, but apparently evolved by himself, and formed a body of doctrine that changed with time as inevitably as his physical body. The humorist was always ready to have his fling as the spirit listed. Peacock saw what a magnificent joke it would be to compare the great sea-wall defending the plain of Gwaelod, and the preposterous methods of those charged to maintain it, with the whole Conservative system; he was prepared to burlesque the arguments of those who opposed the Reform Bill, and at the same time to enjoy himself in depicting a

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xi.

<sup>2</sup> Van Doren, 167-169.

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golden age, centuries before utilitarianism destroyed romance.<sup>1</sup> He was learned in Welsh myth and folk-lore. So he took three ancient legends, the history of the bard Taliesin, the tradition of the lost Cantref and of the negligence of Seithenyn, and the myth of Guenevere's abduction by Melwas, connected them together, and filled in the gaps in a way that suited himself, not troubling if parts remain obscure, so long as the principal scenes stand out distinctly.<sup>2</sup> In the immortal inebriate, Prince Seithenyn, he had a Rabelaisian figure whose sayings and doings gave him all the opportunities he needed for humour and satire. Many of the songs were paraphrased from the Welsh,<sup>3</sup> and these are not among his best; the incomparable War-song of Dinas Vawr was entirely his own, and he had a right to be proud of it, "being the quintessence of all the war-songs that ever were written, and the sum and substance of all the appetencies, tendencies, and consequences of military glory." It is an epitome, also, of Peacock's Aristophanic irony, of which no better example can be quoted than Seithenyn's answer to the objections that the embankment was in a state of dangerous decay.

"Decay," said Seithenyn, "is one thing, and danger is another. Everything that is old must decay. That the embankment is old, I am free to confess; that it is somewhat rotten in parts, I will not altogether deny; that it is any the worse for that, I do most sturdily gainsay. It does its business well: it works well: it keeps out the water from the land, and it lets in the wine upon the High Commissioner of Embankment. Cupbearer, fill. Our ancestors were wiser than we: they built it in their wisdom; and, if we should be so rash as to try to mend it, we should only mar it."

<sup>1</sup> It is amusing to observe the attempts of the party man to take credit for the wisdom of Seithenyn and apply Peacock's satire to the other side. Saintsbury couldn't bear to let the Radicals have such a prize, and insists on the "very double-edged nature" of the satire. Others, also, appropriate the book for the Tories (e.g. Van Doren, 179-180).

<sup>2</sup> For his sources see Van Doren, 171-175, and the general survey in Volume I., chaps. iii.-iv.—"Origins of the Arthurian Legend" and "From Legend to Romance." A geological account of the inundation that created Cardigan Bay will be found in *The Evolution of a Coast-line*, by William Ashton (1920), chap. xxxi.—"The lost Cantref Gwaelod."

<sup>3</sup> Saintsbury's introduction to *Elphin and Rhododaphne* (1897), xiii.

Remonstrance only excites him to fine frenzies of oratory. He conjures up a vivid picture of the equinoctial storms battering against the aged piles.

"I would not be so presumptuous as to say, I could build anything that could stand against them half an hour; and here this immortal old work, which God forbid the finger of modern mason should bring into jeopardy, this immortal work has stood for centuries, and will stand for centuries more, if we let it alone. It is well: it works well: let well alone. Cupbearer, fill. It was half rotten when I was born, and that is a conclusive reason why it should be three parts rotten when I die."

The whole body of the High Commission roared approbation. Seithenyn is at once a caricature of the reactionaries led by Canning, an ironical portrait of a universal type of mind, and a figure of absolute humour. Let a bit of the dialogue between him and Taliesin suffice to illustrate his humour; it is when the latter has assured the unknown stranger that Seithenyn is only remembered as the drunkard responsible for the terrible catastrophe of Gwaelod:

After a silence, which he designed to be very dignified and solemn, the stranger spoke again: "I am the man."

"What man?" said Taliesin.

"The man," replied his entertainer, "of whom you have spoken so disparagingly: Seithenyn ap Seithyn Saidi."

"Seithenyn," said Taliesin, "has slept twenty years under the waters of the western sea, as King Gwythno's *Lamentations* have made known to all Britain."

"They have not made it known to me," said Seithenyn, "for the best of all reasons, that one can only know the truth; for, if that which we think we know is not truth, it is something which we do not know. A man cannot know his own death; for, while he knows anything, he is alive; at least, I never heard of a dead man who knew anything, or pretended to know anything; if he had so pretended, I should have told him to his face he was no dead man."

"Your mode of reasoning," said Taliesin, "unquestionably corresponds with what I have heard of Seithenyn's; but how is it possible Seithenyn can be living?"

"Everything that is, is possible, says Catog the Wise,"



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answered Seithenyn, with a look of great sapience. "I will give you proof that I am not a dead man; for, they say, dead men tell no tales: now I will tell you a tale, and a very interesting

This is the quality in which Friar Michael and Dr Folliott also stand apart from the drier and more satirical irony which forms the staple of Peacock's stories and dialogues.

"*Crotchet Castle*" and "*Gryll Grange*" Thirty years elapsed between the last two stories of Peacock, who was nearly all that time at the East India Office, taking mental notes of later crazes, affectations, and social tendencies that he did not hold with. But the one as much as the other has a ripeness and urbanity which were often lacking in his earlier satires. *Crotchet Castle* (1831) was of the same model as *Headlong Hall*, the first; but he put more life and much more human nature into it, as well as more art; and it is the most concise and finished example of the novel which contains next to nothing but talk and discussion, and yet through this medium tells what story there is to tell, develops a bevy of characters, and shows up with fluent and pungent wit a good proportion of the world's follies. From popular novels, newspapers, and the reading public, paper money and political economy, the March of Mind and the Steam Intellect Society, with side strokes at sham mediævalism in Mr Chainmail and his pseudo-Gothic castle and at the romantic poets,<sup>1</sup> in *Crotchet Castle*, he goes on to topics which are almost the same thing under another name in *Gryll Grange*—modern science, newspapers again, "the insane passion of the public for speed," the sad misfortune that Columbus ever discovered America, the result of which has been an "interchange of vices and diseases with Europe" and the substitution of the worse for the better race, the negro for the redskin, with other petted grievances. As Mrs Opimian remarks, "There used to be seven deadly sins. How many has modern progress added to them?" Not very much happens in either novel: as usual the talk constitutes the action, and is amply sufficient. Dr Folliott knocks down his footpad, and comes a cropper

<sup>1</sup> Mr Wilful Wontsee and Mr Rumblesack Shantsee, alluded to by Lady Clarinda, are, of course, Wordsworth and Southey again.

himself in his armchair, at the shock of hearing Mr Crotchet's advanced views on nudism. There is the pretty Welsh idyll of Miss Touchandgo and Mr Chainmail, and the farcical siege of Chainmail Hall. *Gryll Grange* is less exciting, to the ordinary reader of fiction; but for Peacock's elect it is full of incident, even if the sentimental experiences of Mr Falconer's seven vestals do not furnish much dramatic suspense. One principal butt for the satire in *Crotchet Castle* does not actually come upon the scene, though so much is heard about the "learned friend" who is the mainspring of the Steam Intellect Society. Peacock hated Brougham and detested his Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge; but he let him down lightly in *Crotchet Castle*, and, in the long run, perhaps none the less effectively. The characters that do appear are among his best. First, by common consent, stands Dr Folliott, almost, but fortunately not quite, Peacock's own facsimile; humanist, epicurean, anti-romantic, man of the world, intellectually and also physically an athlete, a terror to fatuous opponents and to footpads. Dr Opimian, in *Gryll Grange*, is almost but not quite his peer. Dr Folliott and Lady Clarinda come as near as anyone ever does come to presenting their author's own point of view, and so giving the inspired comment. But the distinction of the women in these last novels is that they are so emancipated from the fetters of contemporary prejudice and propriety. Not a single prude among them! They are indeed a credit to Peacock's chivalry, or his idealism. He was more than up-to-date. Lady Clarinda in wit and intelligence if not in Greek scholarship is a match for Dr Folliott; and Miss Touchandgo, in spite of the light mantle of romantic sentiment which does not misbecome her, shines as a rational being in contrast with the good-looking young ladies of novels not by Peacock. Squire Gryll's niece, the fastidious Morgana, and Miss Niphet who is married with her on the same day as the seven sisters, also belong to the order of women who can take care of themselves and hold their own even in the lists of Peacockian controversy. For the most part, these modern damsels first see the light in the last novels; but

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Anthelia Melincourt and the Stella of *Nightmare Abbey* have a right to be counted among them.

No falling off signs of being extinct when he wrote *Gryll Grange*, and that in the satire of current absurdities if he could have gone on for another half-century there would have been no dearth of propitious absurdities, may be verified from the protest of Mr MacBorrowdale, in some of the last pages Peacock wrote:

"Tables turn as usual, and the ghost-trade appears to be thriving: for instead of being merely audible, the ghosts are becoming tangible, and shake hands under the table with living wiseacres, who solemnly attest the fact. Civilized men ill-use their wives; the wives revenge themselves in their own way, and the Divorce Court has business enough on its hands to employ it twenty years at its present rate of progression. Commercial bubbles burst, and high-pressure boilers blow up, and mountebanks of all descriptions flourish on public credulity. Everywhere there are wars and rumours of wars. The Peace Society has wound up its affairs in the Insolvent Court of Prophecy. A great tribulation is coming on the earth, and Apollyon in person is to be perpetual dictator of all the nations. There is, to be sure, one piece of news in your line. There is a meeting of the Pantopragmatic Society, under the presidency of Lord Facing-both-ways, who has opened it with a long speech, philanthropically designed as an elaborate exercise in fallacies, for the benefit of young rhetoricians. The society has divided its work into departments, which are to meddle with everything, from the highest to the lowest—from a voice in legislation to a finger in Jack Horner's pie. I looked for a department of Fish, with your lordship's name at the head of it; but I did not find it."

That Mr MacBorrowdale was himself a crank does not make this less piquant; that he was a contemporary of the second Samuel Butler makes his speech very interesting indeed.

Peacock was not the only one engaged at this date in scrutinizing, discussing, and if need be satirizing what was going on in the social, political, and intellectual worlds, and the heterogeneous doctrines of critics, theorists, and would-be reformers. His was one way of doing this; others who also

found fiction more congenial or more cogent than the formal *Socio-* treatise expounded themselves in novels less insubordinate *logical* to the laws of fashion. Plumer Ward, Disraeli, Harriet Martineau,<sup>1</sup> and several others in so far as they made their *novels—* novels a vehicle for theory, critical evaluation, or actual *Plumer* propaganda, were the direct successors, if not literally the *Ward* followers, of Moore, Bage, Holcroft, Godwin, and the rest of the novelists of the revolutionary period.<sup>2</sup> Lady Morgan, with her *O'Donnel* (1814) and *Florence M'Carthy*, was relatively unimportant.<sup>3</sup> Disraeli often used irony and persiflage, as well as disputation; but the others show hardly a trace of Peacock's influence or a sign that they had even read him,<sup>4</sup> and Peacock on his side disliked even Disraeli for his foppishness,<sup>5</sup> and was provoked by the heavy and pretentious seriousness of Plumer Ward and his like. The difference between the earlier group and the later is that the former were wider in their outlook and more philosophical in their handling of problems, the latter tended to identify themselves with party politics or with the teachings of definite schools, and to deliver manifestos: the difference does not go deeper, but it has historical significance.

Robert Plumer Ward (1765-1846) was a legal writer, "*Tre-* politician, and society man, of whom Canning said that his *maine*" law books were as pleasant as novels and his novels as dull as *and* law books. The theme of his first novel, *Tremaine, or the "De* *Man of Refinement* (1825), is how to live the great life, and *Vere"* politics are subordinate; in the other, *De Vere, or the Man of Independence* (1827), they are in the forefront, though the moralistic attitude is still paramount. His critics were not quite accurate in reproaching Plumer Ward with being didactic, except indirectly. His tone is certainly very earnest, and laden with a heavy sense of responsibility. But he is

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 111-112.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume V., chap. ix.—"The Novel of Doctrine."

<sup>3</sup> See above, pp. 13-18.

<sup>4</sup> Peacock's name does not occur in *The Political Novel, its Development in England and America*, by Morris Edmund Speare (N.Y., 1904); but for that matter the names of Godwin and Holcroft are not in the index, and Moore and Bage are completely ignored. On the other hand, a number of pages are devoted to the dead-alive Plumer Ward, who was merely the link between one school and the later.

<sup>5</sup> Van Doren, 253.

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more argumentative than didactic. Each novel was conceived as a species of experimental fiction. Given a character with certain endowments and opportunities, aspirations and weaknesses, he works out on paper how it will solve or fail to solve its material and moral problems. He meant his imaginary case, his graphic solution of a complex equation, to have the force of a demonstration; and he tried to give it a literary appeal by his over-studied graces of style. Tremain is a wealthy young man of the upper classes, high-principled, though a sceptic, very hard to please, but sincerely anxious to find a way of life that will worthily employ his natural gifts. He is bored by society, uninterested in politics, repelled by gambling and other fashionable dissipations. The story is how he is gradually drawn out of his misanthropy and shown his place and function in the human world, by his interminable conversations with an older friend, the clergyman Dr Evelyn, and the attractions of that gentleman's daughter, who will not have him till he is converted and reformed. The talk is of life and manners, politics, morals, and above all divinity; there is anxious casuistry even in the love-making, which is otherwise a rather tepid affair. Those around him of his own class who disgust him by their worldliness, and the poor whose circumstances he explores, are perspicuously drawn; but the efforts at a lighter touch are clumsy. The other novel, *De Vere*, is the biography of a commoner who, with some handicaps as a younger son but considerable personal advantages, makes his way to political leadership. Professedly, it is a study of "the passions of ambition and independence," the reverses the one may entail and the satisfaction there is in the pride of independence. There are various incidental studies, especially of the career of a "parvenu." The time is that of Lord Camden's chancellorship (1766-1770), but actual history or portraiture is disclaimed. Nevertheless, the style is again that of a very grave historian, deeply concerned in ethical decisions and their consequences. "If history is . . . philosophy teaching by examples, so also may be the Romance." After an act of profound homage to Scott, whose novels are described as "perfect dramas," the author extols Miss

Edgeworth for having made "the sunken and despised Novel . . . into an instrument of a nation's good." Ward thought of himself apparently as a pupil of Scott, with a turn for philosophic reflection, who had taken a further course in Maria Edgeworth; but his real and only importance was to give a lead to Disraeli, who, however, made politics, not merely subsidiary, but the one serious business, in the majority of his novels, and was not greatly interested in the moral repercussions.<sup>1</sup>

Of smaller importance, though he was talked about and *Lister's* applauded not less than Plumer Ward, was Thomas Henry "Granby" Lister (1800-1842), the first registrar-general of England and Wales, who had a tragedy performed at Drury Lane, and, besides a life of Clarendon, on the large scale, wrote three novels, the first of which, *Granby* (1826), made some noise in the world. Lister was entirely without Ward's moral earnestness, he simply wanted to entertain with pictures of a glittering and slippery world and an engrossing story. But he suffered from the same inability to make things move of themselves, the same weakness for description instead of the drama that carries conviction. The scenes in the same idle society as annoyed Tremain; the routs, the balls at Almack's, the ballet, the opera, and all the rest of what constituted the London season, the haunts of gilded vice, and the rascally under side of fashionable life, are sketched with a caustic vigour that has a distant likeness to Peacock.<sup>2</sup> And yet these descriptions, these analytical portraits, and the sparkling

<sup>1</sup> Plumer Ward completed what it was the fashion to call a "trilogy" with *De Clifford, or the Constant Man* (1841). His house near Amersham was rented by the Disraeli family in 1825, the year of *Tremain*, and Disraeli said it was there that he wrote *Vivian Grey* (1826). This appeared anonymously, and Disraeli was accused by some of passing it off as by the very popular Ward (Monypenny, i. 80-84). He dedicated *Popanilla* to Ward, for whom he had immense admiration. *Vivian Grey* prompted *Pelham* (1828), and Lytton was still further indebted to Plumer Ward in his studies of ambition and crime (see Sadler's *Bulwer*, 115-117).

<sup>2</sup> Lister probably knew Peacock's novels, and tries to emulate his satire, without however being able to set a drawing-room conversation; he was contented to describe. Mr Trebeck, for instance, with his "keen and lively turn for satire," his knowledge of "the gullibility of the world," and his position as "the acknowledged umpire" of a large coterie, is pithily portrayed, and that is all. "He had a quick perception of the foibles of others, and a keen relish for bantering and exposing them. No keeper of a menagerie could better show off a monkey than he could an original. He could ingeniously cause the unconscious subject to place his own absurdities in

drawing-room chat, are only such as might give the stir of life to the pages of an eighteenth-century essayist; the novel skips from scene to scene, much like papers in a *Tatler* or *Spectator*. Granby is merely a pleasant young fellow whose various experiences, with the eventual proof that he is the true heir to Lord Melton, are mildly interesting. And the inevitable villain, Lord Melton's "unnatural" son, who after a bold career of mendacity and treachery kills himself and leaves no further obstacle to the happiness of the lovers, somehow contrives, which could hardly have been intended, to divide the unprejudiced reader's sympathies with the hero. In *Herbert Lacy* (1828) and *Arlington* (1832) the same garish world is presented in the same pictorial way, with similar melodramatic complications. A main incident in the latter novel is the fraudulent attempt to evict Lord Arlington from his ancestral estates, an enterprise foiled by the evidence of Clarkson in the second of two trials, both of which are laboriously staged. No doubt, all three stories abounded in portraits. Lady Harriet Duncan, for instance, in *Granby*, was a faithful delineation of Lady Caroline Lamb. Lytton did not escape the influence of Lister's lively sketching of social converse, though Mrs Gore rallied him on his "partiality to Miss Landon's and Lord Mulgrave's novels in preference to *Arlington*."<sup>1</sup>

*Disraeli  
and the  
novel of  
politics*

When the young Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) published without putting his name to it the first part of his first book, *Vivian Grey* (1826), his future was a matter of anxious uncertainty. After four years in a solicitor's office he had given up the law; he had recently displayed a fluent pen in some financial pamphlets, but had failed in an ambitious journalistic project. Then he had gone away and toured Belgium and the best point of view, and would cloak his derision under the blandest cajolery." This sort of thing is common in the novels of the day, even those extolled as superior. Whole chapters of it contain less of the right stuff than a page of *Melincourt* or *Nightmare Abbey*.

<sup>1</sup> Sadleir, 301 n. Mulgrave, afterwards Marquess of Normanby, and the poetess Letitia Elizabeth Landon are nobodies in the history of fiction, but they were somebodies in their own day as authors of fashionable novels replete with the seductive sentiment which would now be labelled—and then too by intelligent reviewers—as "mawkish and namby-pamby." One of the unfortunate and much-persecuted "L.E.L.'s" novels has half survived: *Ethel Churchill* (see above, p. 117).

the Rhine, collecting impressions which were to be dragged, willy-nilly, into the second part of the novel the following year. It may well be that in imagining the impudent schemes of Vivian Grey he was making a characteristic effort to reinvent his own natural optimism. All his novels were to reflect a mood, a hope, or a projected line of action. That Vivian's little game ended ignominiously does not matter; this was rather the result of Disraeli's inability to create a strong man than of design. His philosophy now and for some decades was simply the one that he thought so true and important that he let Ixion inscribe it as an oracle in Minerva's album, "Adventures are to the Adventurous." Disraeli could hardly yet say, "The fruit of my tree of knowledge is plucked"; but he made Vivian Grey, who was the same age as himself, speak and act as if that were the case with him; and, when at any crisis such wisdom proves a bruised reed, he does not moralize on the event or let it stand for poetic justice, but simply lets the story cease for the time being. "Here leave we Vivian! . . . I am, as yet, but standing without the gate of the Garden of Romance."

In *Vivian Grey*, then, he was trying his wings, or, a better "*Vivian*" metaphor, flying a kite, for this was doubly a venture of the "*Grey*" young Disraeli's, into literature and into politics. Up to the launching of the political complot, the story is mere autobiography—the first three phases, boyism, puppyism, dandyism. Everyone who knows has recognized Disraeli's father in Horace Grey. Then the dandy tries to start his new party, gets on swimmingly, and suddenly comes to grief; he has been found out. Disraeli too is found out; the novel likewise comes to grief; but at any rate he made a better start than Bulwer, whose *Pelham* two years later was to serve as a measure of the difference between two men whose careers were to be largely parallel and sometimes to intersect.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Lytton was a year older, and Disraeli, it is amusing to read, was conscience-stricken, even later than this, to see how much faster he was getting on than himself. "Alas!" he writes in his diary (Monypenny, i. 235), "I struggle from Pride. Yes! It is Pride that now prompts me, not Ambition. They shall not say I have failed. . . . I remember expressing this feeling to Bulwer, as we were returning from Bath together, a man who was at that moment an M.P., and an active one, editing a political journal and writing at the same time a novel and a profound and admirable



story of Vivian's intrigue is highly theatrical, farce, when it is not too serious, relieved with melodrama, which Disraeli's wit and irony do not quite carry off because he is too conscious of the descent. But that the young author who had not come nearer to the world of politics than by the high road of journalism was already at home there is manifest.<sup>1</sup> The selfish, fainéant magnates whose paltry ambitions Vivian overreaches in constructing his Carabas party are of the same base metal as some of the most characteristic figures in *Coningsby*, written nearly twenty years later. He failed when he tried to depict a leader of men in Cleveland, and a seducer of men, such as he was often to try to depict, in Mrs Felix Lorraine. All he could do was to get rid of both, at a moment's notice, by the crudest melodramatic methods. Mrs Lorraine is caught poisoning; Cleveland, who is a dead shot, receives a bullet through his heart from the boy Vivian. Disraeli says at the head of one chapter: "These conversations play the very deuce with one's story."<sup>2</sup> Actually, it is the scraps of conversation, the bons mots that sum these up, as "If you wish to win a man's heart, allow him to confute you," and the swift summaries of character like those struck out in malicious talk, that give the story its life. For verbal brilliance, read the witty account of a dull anecdote, the Chevalier de Boëffleurs' story, with a point he had forgotten, of the Polish nobleman, whose name he could not remember. For mordant miniaturizing, take the first introduction of Mrs Felix Lorraine, whose husband had just been expelled as a blackleg from society and his club. It is Peacock with a difference.

By this unfortunate exposure, Mr Felix Lorraine was obliged to give in a match, which was on the tapis, with the celebrated Miss Mexico, on whose million he had determined to set up a character and a chariot, and at the same time pension his mistress, and subscribe to the Society for the philosophical work. He turned round and pressed my arm and said in a tone the sincerity of which could not be doubted: 'It is true, my dear fellow, it is true. We are sacrificing our youth, the time of pleasure, the bright season of enjoyment—but we are bound to go on, we are bound.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> He knew just as little from personal contact of the high society that he paints so glibly (see Monypenny, i. 36).

<sup>2</sup> Book II., chap. ii.

Suppression of Vice. Felix left England for the Continent, and in due time was made drum-major at Barbadoes, or fiscal at Ceylon, or something of that kind. While he loitered in Europe, he made a conquest of the heart of the daughter of some German baron, and after six weeks passed in the most affectionate manner, the happy couple performing their respective duties with perfect propriety, Felix left Germany for his colonial appointment, and also left his lady behind him. Mr Lorraine had duly and dutifully informed his family of his marriage; and they, as amiably and affectionately, had never answered his letters, which he never expected they would. Profiting by their example, he never answered his wife's, who, in due time, to the horror of the Marquess, landed in England, and claimed the protection of her "beloved husband's family." The Marquess vowed he would never see her; the lady, however, one morning gained admittance, and from that moment she never quitted her brother-in-law's roof, and not only had never quitted it, but now made the greatest favour of her staying.

The drawing of this questionable figure is both overdone and underdone, like many others at this stage of Disraeli's progress; her malevolence is crudely exaggerated, and at the same time her motives, in trying to poison Vivian for example, are left unintelligible. More in his line, and a foretaste of his rhetorical opulence, is the ushering in of Mrs Million:

She was leaning on the Marquess' arm, and in a travelling dress, namely, a crimson silk pelisse, hat and feathers, with diamond ear-rings, and a rope of gold round her neck. A train of about twelve persons, consisting of her noble fellow-travellers, toad-eaters, physicians, secretaries, &c. &c. &c. followed. The entrée of her Majesty could not have created a greater sensation than did that of Mrs Million. All fell back. Gartered peers, and starred ambassadors, and baronets with blood older than the creation, and squires, to the antiquity of whose veins chaos was a novelty; all retreated, with eyes that scarcely dared to leave the ground; even Sir Plantagenet Pure, whose family had refused a peerage regularly every century, now, for the first time in his life, seemed cowed, and in an awkward retreat to make way for the approaching presence got entangled with the mameluke boots of my Lord Alhambra.

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There is more of his fluent hyperbole, combined with hilarious horseplay, in the episode of the Palace of the Wines, in the second part, where each guest has to drain an enormous ration from Oberon's magic horn, on pain of a forfeit. The humour, however, is not up to the standard of Peacock or Rabelais.<sup>1</sup>

"Popanilla"

*The Voyage of Captain Popanilla* (1828) was the first of a number of Lucianic stories which appeared at short intervals and may as well be considered together. Lucian had fascinated the schoolboy Disraeli, and several of these definitely merit the term Lucianic; but it must not be forgotten or made light of that it was Peacock who had recently naturalized the brief novel of pointed conversation between burlesque characters, which was at once a counterchange of political or philosophical ideas, usually in a travestied form, and a satire of follies and abuses.<sup>2</sup> *Popanilla* is aimed at the materialistic teachings of the Benthamites. After making himself a nuisance in the isle of Fantaisie by preaching the utilitarian doctrines which he had found in a book of useful knowledge, the captain is sent to exert his talents on the inhabitants of Vraibleusia, where perchance they will not be wasted. He arrives at Hubbabub, the capital; and the story now becomes a satirical account of his surprising experiences in this parody of the English social and political system, the land of liberty, and, most glorious of all, of free competition. The tale is not well knit, and the strokes are dealt rather at random; but some do execution. His cicerone reminds Popanilla that he is now in "the richest and the most charitable country in the world"; and hardly are the words out of his mouth when they are accosted by a man upon crutches, who, "telling them in a broken voice that he had

<sup>1</sup> Vivian's journey through the German pine-forests and the adventures that befall him at princely Courts, his affair with the archduchess, etc., seem distantly to foreshadow *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*. The hard-headed Beckendorff, who nips his passion in the bud, might even be a sketch for Otilia's tutor, Dr Julius von Karsteg.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Sadleir (in *Bulwer, a Panorama*, 246) contends that William Maginn's satirical novel, *Whiteball, or the days of George IV* (1829), "with its fantastic blend of actuality and wild improbability, was almost certainly the inspiration of Disraeli's *Popanilla*." Agreed, if too much is not read into the word "inspiration."

a wife and twelve infant children dependent on his support, supplicated a little charity."

Popanilla was about to empty part of his pocketfuls into the mendicant's cap, but his companion repressed his unphilosophical facility. "By no means!" said his friend, who, turning round to the beggar, advised him, in a mild voice, to *work*; calmly adding, that if he presumed to ask charity again he should certainly have him bastinadoed.

He is taken to a shop to buy a purse, and is shown one costing four crowns. The shopman on the other side of the street rushes in and offers one for three crowns.

The original merchant, not at all surprised at the intrusion, and not the least apologizing for his former extortion, then demanded two. His rival being more than his match, he courteously dropped upon his knee, and requested his customer to accept the article gratis, for his sake. The generous dealer would inevitably have carried the day, had not his rival humbly supplicated the purchaser not only to receive his article as a gift, but also the compliment of a crown inside. "What a terrible cheat the first merchant must have been!" said the puzzled Popanilla, as they proceeded on their way. "By no means!" said his calm companion; "the purse was sufficiently cheap even at four crowns. This is not Cheaterly; this is Competition!"

Popanilla is most astonished, however, by an excise officer, who presents a demand-note for the tax he has incurred by walking about the city. The man explains that walking had been the only thing left untaxed, and as there was a slight deficiency in the last quarter's revenue the Government had no alternative but to impose this new duty. Further—

it was a tax which did not press heavily upon the individual, because the Vraibleusians were of a sedentary habit; that, besides, it was an opinion every day more received among the best judges that the more a man was taxed the richer he ultimately would prove; and he concluded by saying that Popanilla need not make himself uneasy about these demands, because, if he were ruined to-morrow, being a foreigner, he was entitled by the law of the land to five thousand a year; whereas

he, the excise-man, being a native-born Vraibleusian, had no claims whatever upon the Government; therefore he hoped his honour would give him something to drink.

The badinage grows uproarious when they visit a neighbouring island, which seems to be in a state of chronic disorder. Excitement begins as soon as they sit down to a meal at the hotel.

As his neighbour was telling him an excellent joke a man entered the room and shot the joker through the head. The opposite guest immediately charged his pistol with effect, and revenged the loss. A party of men, well armed, now rushed in, and a brisk conflict immediately ensued. Popanilla, who was very dizzy (he had previously mistaken the whisky in the carafe for water), was fortunately pushed under the table. When the firing and slashing had ceased, he ventured to crawl out. He found that the assailants had been beaten off, though unfortunately with the total loss of all the guests (*sic*), who lay lifeless about the room.

He rang the bell, "and the waiters, who were remarkably attentive, swept away the dead bodies, and brought him a roasted potato for supper."

"Alroy"  
and  
"Isk-  
ander"

Disraeli went on a long and leisurely tour to Spain, Malta, Greece, and the Levant (1828-1831); and at Jerusalem, inspired by the sense of being in the Holy Land, the home of his race, began *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (1833), a romance woven round the idealized figure of a rebel against the Mohammedan conquerors, in the twelfth century. He wrote in his diary: "Poetry is the safety-valve of my passions, but I wish to act what I write. My works are the embodiments of my feelings. In *Vivian Grey* I have portrayed my active and real ambition. In *Alroy* my ideal ambition. The *Psychological Romance* <sup>1</sup> is a development of my poetic character. This trilogy is the secret history of my feelings." <sup>2</sup> Thus the tale of David Alroy, supposed representative of the Jewish royal house, whilst written as a historical romance authenticated with erudite notes, is a rhapsody recording the struggle of Disraeli's Fancy with his Reason, and of his Ambition with

<sup>1</sup> *Contarini Fleming*.

<sup>2</sup> *Monypenny*, i. 236.

Destiny. Whatever allowance of the poetic character was vouchsafed to him, it certainly did not include the lyrical gift. Hence the fancy in *Alroy* vents itself in a half-versified and half-rhymed prose which to-day effectually screens it from the curiosity of anyone in the least fastidious, and yet the sincerity is unimpeachable.<sup>1</sup> *The Rise of Iskander*, published as an extra item with *Contarini Fleming* (1832), is a less grandiloquent tale of Albania in the days of Scanderbeg, another patriotic rebel against the Turks.

He returned to the Popanilla strain in two short "*Ixion*" extravaganzas, *Ixion in Heaven* and *The Infernal Marriage*<sup>and</sup> (1833), which are his masterpieces in this line and can best sustain the comparison with the classic Lucian or the *Infernal Marriage*<sup>"The</sup> contemporary Peacock. Retelling the legendary stories in terms of to-day, Disraeli introduces his august celestials in their hours of ease, gossiping and scoring off each other, some who have a traditional job talking shop, all of them subject to infirmities that are only too familiar in the world we know. Ixion is warned on his arrival in Elysium that the only heiresses there are the Parcæ, "confirmed old maids." "Venus is a flirt; Minerva a prude, who fancies she has a correct taste and a strong mind; and Juno a politician." Apollo is a melancholy, dandiacal person, like Byron, who has a "horror of getting fat," lives on soda-water and biscuits, and votes immortality a bore. The elopement of Proserpine and the king of Hades, in the other piece, is equally droll.

"And which is our next stage?" inquired Proserpine.

"The centre of Earth," replied Pluto. "Travelling is so much improved that at this rate we shall reach Hades before night."

"Alas!" exclaimed Proserpine, "is not this night?"

"You are not unhappy, my Proserpine?"

"Beloved of my heart, I have given up everything for you! I do not repent, but I am thinking of my mother."

"Time will pacify the Lady Ceres. What is done cannot be undone. In the winter, when a residence among us is even desirable, I should not be surprised were she to pay us a visit."

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* "Without the gate, my maidens wait, to offer you a robe of state. Then, brother dear, I pray you come and mingle in our festival."

"Her prejudices are so strong," murmured the bride. "O! my Pluto, I hope your family will be kind to me."

"Who could be unkind to Proserpine? Ours is a very domestic circle. I can assure you that everything is so well ordered among us that I have no recollection of a domestic broil."

"But marriage is such a revolution in a bachelor's establishment," replied Proserpine, despondingly. "To tell the truth, too, I am half frightened at the thought of the Furies. I have heard that their tempers are so violent."

"They mean well; their feelings are strong, but their hearts are in the right place. I flatter myself you will like my nieces, the Parcæ. They are accomplished, and favourites among the men."

"Indeed!"

"Oh! quite irresistible."

"My heart misgives me. I wish you had at least paid them the compliment of apprising them of our marriage."

"Cheer up. For myself, I have none but pleasant anticipations. I long to be at home once more by my own fireside, and patting my faithful Cerberus."

"I think I shall like Cerberus; I am fond of dogs."

"I am sure you will. He is the most faithful creature in the world."

"Is he very fierce?"

"Not if he takes a fancy to you; and who can help taking a fancy to Proserpine?"

"Ah! my Pluto, you are in love."

Tiresias at his rubber is a capital scene, full of hints on the science of diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> "Pray, my dear Tiresias," asks Proserpine, "how came you to trump my best card?" "Because I wanted the lead. And those who want to lead, please your Majesty, must never hesitate about sacrificing their friends." He has his say also on Disraeli's theory of opportunism. "Next to knowing when to seize an opportunity," replied Tiresias, "the most important thing in life is to know when to forgo an advantage." The artifice in most of these dialogues is patent: the *bons mots* are so obviously prepared and so deliberately led up to. Spontaneity and abandon are far

<sup>1</sup> No wonder!—for the original was Talleyrand.

to seek, much more than in Peacock's dialogues. The Elysians are like an over-conducted orchestra, each with his little part coming in at the maestro's nod, with a precision not a bit like impromptu.

*The Young Duke* (1831) and *Contarini Fleming* (1832) were "The now before the world, the one slightly, the other deeply, *Young Duke*" reflective of their author's personality and aspirations. In the former there is more reflection and oracular wisdom than in *Vivian Grey*; some of the harangues seem to come direct from the statesman in Disraeli. Another young man, born a duke and enormously rich, having a vast conceit of himself determines to go his own way and make his own future. So he rebuffs his guardian, the generous Dacre, and finds out too late that May Dacre is the only woman for him. He goes the pace, wastes his fortune, and on the brink of ruin throws himself into Dacre's arms. By this time his character is formed, or reformed; he makes a great speech in the Lords, and performs various actions that win him May Dacre at the third asking. With the doubtful exception of this young lady, the people who say witty or do significant things are only intellectual entities not clothed in flesh and blood. The duke himself is not much more than a figure of rhetoric; and the plot to destroy him by involving him with Lady Aphrodite Grafton is only a slight improvement on Vivian's risky confidences with Mrs Felix Lorraine. And yet Disraeli can produce such a chapter of keen, firm realism as the two days and two nights in the gambling-hell at Brighton, when the duke "found that he was minus one hundred thousand pounds." Was it in him, after all, to have been a novelist, had he not subordinated his novels, like everything else, to the resolve to be Prime Minister? <sup>1</sup>

*Contarini Fleming*, a *Psychological Romance* (1832), written, "Con-says the preface, "after deep meditation, and in a beautiful *tarini* and distant land," might almost be described as a prose *Fleming*" amalgam of *Alastor* and *Childe Harold*, the poetical Contarini

<sup>1</sup> The burden of Leslie Stephen's essay, "Mr Disraeli's Novels," is that a promising novelist was lost in Disraeli's "degradation" into a Prime Minister. Strange to say, Stephen pronounced *Henrietta Temple* and *Contarini Fleming* to be Disraeli's most satisfactory performances (*Hours in a Library*, 2nd series).



being a combination of Shelley and Byron with the author's ideal self. His father, Baron Fleming, is Minister of State in a Scandinavian kingdom, where this sensitive, brooding introvert passes his turbulent youth. The stern, worldly old politician wants him to be a statesman, like himself. But Contarini thinks he is a poet; only, alas! he cannot write poetry. He does write a book, *Manstein*, satirizing the people at the Court, and is ever after identified with this blunder-piece as Disraeli had been with *Vivian Grey*. The baron has been frowned on as a stranger, and Contarini too finds himself out of place in this "fatal society"; he must re-educate himself. But he is as erratic as Scythrop. He runs away from school, and keeps company with a philosophic painter. He runs away from the university and becomes a robber chieftain, in the lofty romantic manner of Schiller's Karl Moor. Finally, he runs away from his diplomatic duties, and makes his way to Venice, ancestral home of the Contarini and the dream of his boyhood. The analogy with Disraeli's visit to the home of his forefathers tells its own tale. The rest of the book is visionary. Contarini meets his beautiful cousin Alceste, in circumstances "founded upon the extreme mysteries of sympathy, and carried on by the influence of animal magnetism."<sup>1</sup> Disraeli was fully abreast, and not entirely scornful, of the latest popular crazes. They elope, though she is betrothed to another man and also, seemingly, pledged to a convent; and they spend a blissful year in the Levant. Then she dies in childbed, leaving Contarini to wander like Manfred or the Giaour all over the Orient—in short, to recapitulate Childe Harold's tour and re-echo his meditations in Disraeli's poetic prose.<sup>2</sup>

"Henri-  
etta  
Temple"

Between this date and the completion of his next novel Disraeli was busy with practical politics, and also with his Shelleyan poem, *The Revolutionary Epick* (1834). In *The Present Crisis Examined* (1834), *A Vindication of the British*

<sup>1</sup> This episode *might* have suggested Kipling's story, "The Brushwood Boy."

<sup>2</sup> He had taken great pains with *Contarini Fleming*, and was very proud of it as a fine example of prose writing. In the "General Preface" to *Lothair* he congratulates himself on having received unsolicited tributes from Goethe and Beckford, and having seen a criticism by Heine. Old Madame d'Arblay, also, was an enthusiastic appreciator (Monypenny, i. 191).

*Constitution* (1835), *The Letters of Runnymede* and *The Spirit of Whiggism* (1836), he dealt trenchantly and fearlessly, for they were mostly anonymous, with the men and measures confronting the world, and formulated his creed of democratic Conservatism, blending Tory respect for the constitution with Radical concern for the state of the people. This was to be further elaborated and driven home to the nation's intelligence and feelings in his three later novels, *Coningsby*, *Sybil*, and *Tancred*. Now appeared two having nothing to do with politics, *Henrietta Temple* (1836),<sup>1</sup> and a few months afterwards *Venetia* (1837); like all that had preceded they were anonymous, but were the last so to appear. *Henrietta Temple* was subtitled "A Love Story," and there is indubitable evidence that he wrote the first volume in 1834 when he was himself in love, concluding the book late in 1836 after he and the lady had parted.<sup>2</sup> Thus the sincerity with which he tries to convey the delirium of Armine's passion cannot be questioned. It is the story of a man engaged to one woman and falling madly in love with another, both of them in love with him. Unfortunately for any lively interest in Armine, the whole issue turns on questions of property. The impoverished scion of an ancient house, he woos the immaculate Katherine Grandison, who adores him and can endow him with immense wealth. Henrietta is as poor as he when they fall mutually in love. But after they have been torn asunder by the revelation of his perfidy, she becomes heiress to a fortune as noble as Katherine's. She accepts another suitor; and the problem now is to rearrange sentiments, and, by an interchange of lovers, bring about the symmetry which would have been but for that embarrassing first engagement. This delicate service is tactfully discharged by their friend Count Mirabel, an undisguised portrait of Count d'Orsay.

A singularly artificial story this; and, though the emotion *Disraeli's* is patently genuine, the style in which it is expressed sounds *rhetoric* unreal and affected. The reason is that Disraeli had no other means of rendering the passion of a story than his habitual

<sup>1</sup> Usually dated 1837; but see Monypenny, i. 337.

<sup>2</sup> Monypenny, i. 339.

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rhetoric. If this does not ring true, it is not that there is not truth behind it. He is not a mere sentimentalist.<sup>1</sup> The passion cries out for lyrical utterance, and this is what Disraeli cannot give. But which novelist of this period could have given it? The time had not yet come, nor was it to come till the advent of the Brontë sisters and Meredith. There are no great love-stories in fiction during the romantic period, unless such reticent novels as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* could be so described; but those are in essence comedies, in which the fury of passion would have struck a discordant note. Disraeli tried again and again to evolve a love romance that would carry lovers and readers off their feet together. He tried rhetoric, rhythmical prose, all the resources of hyperbolic protest—in vain. He was not a poet; hence the awkwardness and inadequacy. Thirty years later, in *The Claverings*, Trollope was to handle exactly the same situation as that of *Henrietta Temple*, with the power of a sober realist; but that was equally out of Disraeli's reach. He sometimes tried even verse; and it is only necessary to compare Peacock's songs and mere poetical shreds and patches to see what advantage is enjoyed by the novelist who also happens to be a poet.

In fact, there is nothing better in *Henrietta Temple* than Count Mirabel, for all Disraeli's best figures were drawn from the life. Mirabel's Christian name, Alcibiades, the same as that of Armine's most-admired ancestor, indicates his disposition and the careless optimism which Disraeli had not yet repudiated as an axiom of his practical philosophy.

"Fancy a man ever being in low spirits," said the Count Mirabel. "Life is too short for such bêtises. The most unfortunate wretch alive calculates unconsciously that it is better to live than to die. Well, then, he has something in his favour. Existence is a pleasure, and the greatest. The world cannot rob us of that; and if it is better to live than to die, it is better to live in a good humour than a bad one. If a man be convinced that existence is the greatest pleasure, his happiness

<sup>1</sup> This has been said before. Henley, in that *éloge* which is the finest offered by literary criticism to Disraeli (*Views and Reviews*—"Literature," 1890, p. 32), remarks: "He was no sentimentalist: as what great artist in government has ever been?"

may be increased by good fortune, but it will be essentially independent of it. He who feels that the greatest source of pleasure always remains to him ought never to be miserable. The sun shines on all: every man can go to sleep: if you cannot ride a fine horse, it is something to look upon one; if you have not a fine dinner, there is some amusement in a crust of bread and Gruyère. Feel slightly, think little, never plan, never brood. Everything depends upon the circulation; take care of it. Take the world as you find it; enjoy everything. Vive la bagatelle!"

There were originals more definitely for the chief characters "*Venetia* (1837), but for the purposes of the story their respective qualities are reapportioned. To Lord Cadurcis is allotted the personality of Byron; and, except that he has a silly and ill-tempered mother and there is a Lady Monteagle corresponding to Lady Caroline Lamb, he acts the part of Shelley. Marmion Herbert is like Shelley but takes Byron's part, separates from his wife and is ostracized by society, and like Byron has a daughter, Venetia, who is brought up in ignorance of her father, and is loved by Cadurcis. Their story, with that of the exquisite child Venetia's gradual awakening of love and admiration for her banished father, is related with skill and tenderness. The two poets go down together in the foundering of the yacht off Lerici. Disraeli had borrowed something from Byron in *Contarini Fleming*, and had smiled at him in *Ixion*; in *Venetia* he takes more liberties, and distorts fact considerably more than Peacock had done in *Nightmare Abbey*. He was fairly well versed in the writings of both men; he felt that he had some personal affinity, especially with Byron; and he knew a good deal about their characters and histories that was not yet common property. For that date, in consequence, this was one of the most revealing books about the two poets.<sup>1</sup>

Disraeli was now in the Commons, and one of the most *The* zealous in a small group known to friends and enemies as the *political* Young England party, whose views on political, social, and *trilogy*

<sup>1</sup> For Disraeli's sources see *Essays by an Ex-Librarian* (1901), by Richard Garnett—"Shelley and Beaconsfield." Byron's valet, Tita Falcieri, who was with Shelley at Lerici, came into the elder Disraeli's service. Disraeli also knew Trelawny, and evidently had access to papers not given to the public until much later. See also Monypenny, i. 362-363 and app. 383-385.

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religious affairs are set forth in the trilogy, *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845), and *Tancred* (1847). He was recognized as their chief spokesman; and eventually, as the result of his statement of the Young England programme in the three novels and of his activities in Parliament, he became virtually leader of the Conservative opposition and formally succeeded on the death of Lord George Bentinck. His life of that statesman is one of his ablest studies of politics.<sup>1</sup> Disraeli and his friends were opposed to the utilitarian philosophy and the exclusive devotion of its political disciples to the pursuit of wealth. Without approving the actual measures proposed, they were in sympathy with the Chartist movement, on which Carlyle had fulminated in *Chartism* (1840), putting forward his own particular remedy for social and economic ills in *Past and Present* (1843). The remedy preached by Young England was not fundamentally different though an affair of more practical politics. They saw that the Whig aristocracy, "the Venetian oligarchy" as they branded it, which had been established more firmly than ever by the Reform Act of 1832, the proletariat being practically disfranchised by the ten-pound qualification, cared nothing for social reform, and opposed or whittled down the remedial legislation brought forward by other parties. To Disraeli and his friends the vital question was "the Condition of England," and this became their war-cry. They aimed at a reconstruction of the Conservative party, which would make it more democratic, and the reform or disablement of an aristocracy "that did not lead." They professed unshaken loyalty to the Crown, asseverating that the constitution had been warped and misused in the interests of a selfish minority. George Smythe, afterwards Viscount Strangford, *Coningsby's* original, was one of the most earnest of these young statesmen; Lord John Manners and Alexander Baillie Cochrane, portrayed as Lord Henry Sydney and the chivalrous Buckhurst, were two other leading spirits. Ambrose Lisle Phillips, the Roman Catholic portrayed as Eustace Lyle, was not in the House.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Lord George Bentinck, a Political Biography* (1852).

<sup>2</sup> *Monypenny*, ii. 162-63; Smythe is said to be better portrayed in the *Waldershare of Endymion*.

*Coningsby, or the New Generation*, is a general survey of "Con-England and the English governing classes at that time, with *ingsby*" a sufficient review of the past to show how the existing situation had arisen. It is also a discursive statement of principles and ideas, mainly through conversations between all sorts of men, the Young Englanders and their foes, and friendly critics such as the statesmanlike industrialist Millbank and the omniscient and oracular Sidonia, autocrat of the financial world, one of those Disraelian figures through which the genius of the Orient is brought to bear upon Western ideas. In tracing out the evolution of the Young England creed and showing the game of politics going on, Disraeli gives Coningsby his political education: the novel contains little else by way of story than the gradual maturing of his mind and temper and of his capacity for statesmanship, through these various contacts and the ups and downs of his private fortunes, as the grandson of a leader in the opposite camp. Along with all this come episodes of electioneering and political manœuvring, which give endless openings for caustic irony. Conversation is Disraeli's chief instrument, and he performs upon it oftentimes brilliantly, though all the while it is clear that he has to rely unduly upon this resource in mere default of creative power. The dialogue which sufficed for all purposes in the hands of such a master as Peacock here frequently degenerates into prosy and inconclusive debate, or into harangues such as might have been delivered from the hustings, with little of the subtle art lurking in the famous election for Onevote. On the other hand, the hatred for utilitarianism and for both Radical and Tory shams was shared with Peacock. They would have joined with Carlyle in execrating the "dismal science" of political economy.

In such a cross-section of the English body politic the *The* characters are inevitably legion, and many are allowed only *charac-* a speech or two. Nowhere has Disraeli shown his inherent *ters* capacities as a novelist more signally than in the domineering personality of Coningsby's grandfather, Lord Monmouth, developed from the same original as Thackeray's Marquess of Steyne, with the uglier traits omitted. This time he was

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better than his junior, the professional novelist. He suppressed any party feeling that the occasion might have prompted, and with admirable urbanity placed this superb embodiment of the arrogance and egoism, the grace and courtliness of his order, at the summit of the world depicted, alive in every fibre. It was a stroke of the finest art to allow Monmouth to make his most formidable appearance near the end of the story, when all the arguments have been delivered that ought to have extinguished him and his like for ever. Coningsby has been gently remonstrating with his grandfather, who wishes him to fight the Darlford constituency in opposition to Millbank, with whose daughter he is in love. In a hesitating tone and with great embarrassment he urges that, in truth, he has no wish to enter Parliament.

"What?" said Lord Monmouth.

"I feel that I am not yet sufficiently prepared for so great a responsibility as a seat in the House of Commons," said Coningsby.

"Responsibility!" said Lord Monmouth, smiling. "What responsibility is there? How can anyone have a more agreeable seat? The only person to whom you are responsible is your own relation, who brings you in. And I don't suppose there can be any difference on any point between us. You are certainly still young; but I was younger by nearly two years when I first went in. There can be no difficulty. All you have got to do is to vote with your party. . . ."

"I am sorry," said Coningsby, rather pale, but speaking with firmness, "I am sorry that I could not support the Conservative party."

"By —!" exclaimed Lord Monmouth, starting in his seat. "Some woman has got hold of him, and made him a Whig!"

"No, my dear grandfather," said Coningsby, scarcely able to repress a smile, serious as the interview was becoming, "nothing of the kind, I assure you. No person can be more anti-Whig."

"I don't know what you are driving at, sir," said Lord Monmouth, in a hard, dry tone.

Harry continues his attempt to explain the very different views of the new generation, but it is trying to reason with a stone wall.

"I can't follow you, sir," said Lord Monmouth, again in his hard tone. "Our interests are inseparable, and therefore there can never be any sacrifice of conduct on your part. What you mean by sacrifice of affections, I don't comprehend; but as for your opinions, you have no business to have any other than those I uphold. You are too young to form opinions."

"I am sure I wish to express them with no unbecoming confidence," replied Coningsby; "I have never intruded them on your ear before; but this being an occasion when you yourself said, sir, I was about to commence my public career, I confess I thought it was my duty to be frank; I would not entail on myself long years of mortification by one of those ill-conceived entrances into political life which so many public men have cause to deplore. . . ."

"I tell you what it is, Harry," said Lord Monmouth, very drily, "members of this family may think as they like, but they must act as I please. You must go down on Friday to Darlford and declare yourself a candidate for the town, or I shall reconsider our mutual positions. . . . I sent for Rigby this morning on other business which now occupies me, and find he is out of town. He will return to-morrow; and will be here at three o'clock, when you can meet him. You will meet him, I doubt not, like a man of sense," added Lord Monmouth, looking at Coningsby with a glance such as he had never before encountered, "who is not prepared to sacrifice all the objects of life for the pursuit of some fantastical puerilities."

His Lordship rang a bell on his table for Villebecque; and to prevent any further conversation, resumed his papers.

Lord Monmouth's man of business and chief wire-puller, Rigby, a caricature of J. W. Croker, is drawn with a neat irony worthy of Peacock, but with a malice from which the author of *Crotchet Castle* refrained towards his particular aversion, Brougham. This lampoon and the running comedy of the underlings, Tape and Tadpole, have become the classic examples of corruption and subservience. And there is a varied host of political and social magnates, great ladies and would-be great ladies, toadies, parasites, and humbugs, with street politicians such as the Radical shopkeeper, Mr Jawster Sharp, who are the humblest if not the least self-assertive of the rank and file. The strangest creation is the enigmatic



Sidonia. He may not be like anything in Peacock, but his function is. He is related to those makers of startling observations, aphorisms that clinch or sum up the whole course of an argument, who are the figurehead of certain books. Taken singly, his sayings may not be so profound as their sententiousness seems to claim: "Nurture your mind with great thoughts. To believe in the heroic makes heroes." "Life is constant separation." But they do not come singly; he is a great questioner, and his comments electrify Coningsby because they are so transcendently to the point. Disraeli must have drawn heavily upon his commonplace-book for many of Sidonia's disquisitions; it is the stripling Benjamin who would be responsible for the essay on the achievements of youth, only the sonorous first words properly belonging to Sidonia: "For life in general there is but one decree. Youth is a blunder; Manhood is a struggle; Old Age a regret."

"*Sybil*" In *Sybil, or the Two Nations*, the Condition of England is the uppermost theme. Here Disraeli comes face to face with the origins of Chartism. The two nations are the rich and the poor: "Two nations, between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws." Disraeli left no stone unturned in the task of investigating the condition of this despised section of the people; he had the Blue Book issued by a recent Commission on the employment of children, and went on a tour through the depressed areas, notebook in hand. Thus for the exposition his wonted method of alternating views was specially suitable. He begins with a characteristic glance at the political tinkers and the fops and idlers in London, wasting their time and substance in heedless luxury; then turns to the misery and squalor he had witnessed in the north. The principle of contrast is ridden very hard. Outside the walls of Mowbray Castle, the opulent and splendid seat of Earl de Mowbray, lies the poverty-stricken town from which he takes his title

and receives his income. Among the noble guests is the villain of the situation, the harsh, cynical, arrogant Earl of Marney, who is pitted against his tender-hearted brother Egremont, another Coningsby. Egremont falls in love with Sybil, daughter of one of the popular leaders; and so the political and social theme is woven into the love theme. Whig and Tory factions struggling for office are both indifferent to the state of the poor. "They," the Chartists, "had long ceased to distinguish between the two parties who then and now contend for power. And they were right. Between the noble lord who goes out, and the right honourable gentleman who come in, where is the distinctive principle?" The comic interludes of Tape and Tadpole are not discontinued, and give point to the bitter truth. Lord Marney derived his riches from the spoliation of the monasteries in times gone by. With the monasteries expired the only type England ever had of community. "There is no community in England; there is aggregation, but aggregation under circumstances which make it rather a dissociating than a uniting principle." Capital and Labour are sworn opponents. "The Capitalist has found a slave that has supplanted the labour and ingenuity of man. Once he was an artisan: at the best, he now only watches machines; and even that occupation slips from his grasp to the woman and to the child." Hence the Chartists, preaching the general strike.

No slum novelist has ever surpassed the horrors of Disraeli's *The* account of what he saw in his journey through the industrial towns and among the starving agricultural labourers: the degrading slavery, the misery, neglect, and crime, the hideous cruelty to children, the legalized infanticide, the brutal ignorance and heathenism of the masses. So long as he is reporting what he has observed, the realism is terrible in its truth and force. But the moment he lets his generalized types of the lower classes open their lips, his realism fails; his Chartist agitators and humble heroines are only figures of convention, mouthing tirades. Disraeli's best characters are always those drawn from persons whom he has lived with and watched with affectionate indulgence or humorous relish.

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Already, in *Sketches by Boz*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens had begun his great delineation of the people, though *Hard Times* was still in the distance, and Mrs Gaskell was not to give the world her *Mary Barton* till 1848. But both novelists were of a totally different outlook and disposition from Disraeli's, less like him even than they were like each other. In many ways, Disraeli comes nearer to the author of *Chartism* and *Past and Present*, who was dealing with the same tremendous problem. Both drew a similar contrast between the oppressed workers and the dandies and dilettanti lapped in luxury and idleness; both pleaded for loyalty and affection instead of hostility between the upper and lower classes; both urged the duty of leadership upon those whose position rested on a paternal tradition. Both were haters of materialism and mechanical theories, of an inhuman political economy.<sup>1</sup> And they agreed in eschewing formulas and preferring to inculcate ideas and ideals. All that Carlyle wrote on "our present system of individual Mammonism, and Government by Laissez-faire"; on the "False Aristocracies" which are insupportable, and the "True Aristocracies" which are "at once indispensable and not easily attained"; and on the need for "Captains of Industry" to help to make a new world, has its counterpart in *Sybil*. Nor is there much apparently at variance between the views in Disraeli's trilogy and Carlyle's pronouncement: "Aristocracy and Priesthood, a Governing Class and a Teaching Class; these two, sometimes separate, sometimes conjoined as one, and the King a Pontiff King:—there did no Society exist without these two vital elements, there will none exist."

"*Tancred*"

This question of the Priesthood and the Pontiff King, or at any rate of the place of religion in the commonwealth, is the theme of the third part of the trilogy, *Tancred, or the New Crusade*. It did not appear till 1847, when Disraeli was recognized as one of the most talented members in the House, but had not yet succeeded in breaking down the prejudices harboured by all parties against one of alien origin and

<sup>1</sup> Both also agreed with Peacock in despising the current glorification of "Progress." "Enlightened Europe is not happy. Its existence is a fever, which it calls progress. Progress to what?" (*Tancred*, Book III., chap. vii.).

unorthodox education. Yet he boldly urged the unorthodox faith that the spiritual revival necessary to this country must be brought about through the reinvigorating of Christianity by a fresh contact with Judaism. Another young scion of aristocracy, with a vague sense that the world is out of joint and a passion to reform it, is advised by Sidonia to seek light in the East. "When Tancred had finished speaking, there was a pause of a few seconds, during which Sidonia seemed lost in thought; then, looking up, he said, 'It appears to me, Lord Montacute, that what you want is to penetrate the great Asian mystery.'" Tancred sets out for the Holy Land, and the story of his quest, based upon Disraeli's own experiences there, occupies the remainder of the book, though the mystery is never clearly revealed.

But, like the two preceding, this last part of the trilogy *From London* opens in London, with satirical glimpses of the confusion and emptiness of politics, compromise and insincerity in religion, and the all-absorbing vanities of fashion. The low comedy of the first chapter, the anxious debate on table-dressing between the two chefs, reveals a new side of the novelist. More in the style that he must surely have learned from Peacock is Tancred's talk with the bishop, who had been called in by his startled parents to wean him from his projected pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre.

"There is a great spirit rising in the Church," observed the bishop, with thoughtful solemnity; "a great and excellent spirit. The Church of 1845 is not the Church of 1745. We must remember that; we know not what may happen. We shall soon see a bishop at Manchester."

"But I want to see an angel at Manchester."

"An angel!"

"Why not? Why should there not be heavenly messengers, when heavenly messages are most wanted?"

"We have received a heavenly message by one greater than the angels," said the bishop. "Their visits to man ceased with the mightier advent."

"Then why did angels appear to Mary and her companions at the holy tomb?" inquired Tancred.

The interview from which so much was anticipated was not

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satisfactory. The eminent prelate did not realize Tancred's ideal of a bishop, while his lordship did not hesitate to declare that Lord Montacute was a visionary.

A similar touch may be detected in the concise sketch of Mrs Guy Flouncey, the social climber:

A great nobleman met Mrs Guy Flouncey at a country-house, and was fairly captivated by her. Her pretty looks, her coquettish manner, her vivacity, her charming costume, above all, perhaps, her imperturbable good temper, pierced him to the heart. The great nobleman's wife had the weakness to be annoyed. Mrs Guy Flouncey saw her opportunity. She threw over the earl, and became the friend of the countess, who could never sufficiently evince her gratitude to the woman who would not make love to her husband. This friendship was the incident for which Mrs Guy Flouncey had been cruising for years. Men she had vanquished; they had given her a sort of *ton* which she had prudently managed. She had not destroyed herself by any fatal preference. Still, her fashion among men necessarily made her unfashionable among women, who, if they did not absolutely hate her, which they would have done had she had a noble lover, were determined not to help her up the social ladder. Now she had a great friend, and one of the greatest of ladies. The moment she had pondered over for years had arrived. Mrs Guy Flouncey determined at once to test her position. Mrs Guy Flouncey resolved on giving a ball.

Disraeli's Lord Vavasour, the pen-portrait done, at the original's request, of Monckton Milnes, is in the same vein. Even Syrians and Arabs exchange their views in the incisive and more or less paradoxical manner of a dialogue by Peacock; and the inimitable emir Fakredeen, when, for instance, he tries to convince Tancred that the political centre of gravity has shifted from Europe to Asia, adopts the Peacockian method of exposition. But was it not from the same source that Disraeli first had the idea of weaving a thread of exotic fantasy into the ordinary fabric of realistic fiction? The fantasy, however, proves somewhat commonplace, the mysticism only a stage illusion; not that Disraeli was not thoroughly sincere about

it, but simply because his imagination failed him. We are constantly on the brink of some revelation that never comes. Is there any secret? And, if so, is the Asian mystery a racial or a spiritual affair? Apparently, it is both, for only to the dwellers in Palestine had there ever been immediate commerce with the Divine. But the vision in the garden, and the half-mystical, half-erotic dalliance with Eva, the Lady of Bethany, which in spite of its magian accompaniments fails to convey the sense of glamour or of religious ecstasy that Disraeli aimed at, are entirely eclipsed by the fascination of her Syrian foster-brother, Fakredeen, that "restless, intriguing, and imaginative spirit," "perpetually in masquerade; a merchant, a mamlouk, a soldier of fortune, a Tartar messenger, sometimes a pilgrim, sometimes a dervish, always in pursuit of some improbable but ingenious object, or lost in the mazes of some fantastic plot."

Fakredeen was fond of his debts; they were the source indeed of his only real excitement, and he was grateful to them for their stirring powers. The usurers of Syria are as adroit and callous as those of all other countries, and possess no doubt all those repulsive qualities which are the consequence of an habitual control over every generous emotion. But, instead of viewing them with feelings of vengeance or abhorrence, Fakredeen studied them unceasingly with a fine and profound investigation, and found in their society a deep psychological interest. His own rapacious soul delighted to struggle with their rapine, and it charmed him to baffle with his artifice their fraudulent dexterity. He loved to enter their houses with his glittering eye and face radiant with innocence, and, when things were at their very worst and they were remorseless, to succeed in circumventing them. . . . "What should I be without my debts?" he would sometimes exclaim; "dear companions of my life that never desert me! All my knowledge of human nature is owing to them: it is in managing my affairs that I have sounded the depths of the human heart, recognized all the combinations of human character, developed my own powers, and mastered the resources of others."

Yet his ingenuousness equalled his unscrupulousness: such was the paradox of this subtle composition of discords.

Though it was his profession and his pride to simulate and to dissemble, he had a native ingenuousness which was extremely awkward and very surprising, for, the moment he was intimate with you, he told you everything. Though he intended to make a person his tool, and often succeeded, such was his susceptibility, and so strong were his sympathetic qualities, that he was perpetually, without being aware of it, showing his cards.

*Realistic  
descriptions*

Disraeli loved to exercise a descriptive pen in glowing pictures of great houses, parks, and gardens, luxurious and gorgeous interiors, and the splendours of costume and pageantry. But he found a still more appealing subject in the arid landscapes of his own ancestral Palestine, and his descriptions of Jerusalem and the wild glories of the desert are by far his best.

On the morrow they commenced their passage of the mountains, and, after clearing several ranges, found themselves two hours after noon in a defile so strangely beautiful, that to behold it would alone have repaid all the exertions and perils of the expedition. It was formed by precipitous rocks of a picturesque shape and of great height, and of colours so brilliant and so blended that to imagine them you must fancy the richest sunset you have ever witnessed, and that would be inferior, from the inevitable defect of its fleeting character. Here the tints, sometimes vivid, sometimes shadowed down, were always equally fair: light blue heights, streaked, perhaps, with scarlet and shaded off to lilac or purple; a cleft of bright orange; a broad peach-coloured expanse, veined in delicate circles and wavy lines of exquisite grace; sometimes yellow and purple stripes; sometimes an isolated steep of every hue flaming in the sun, and then, like a young queen on a gorgeous throne, from a vast rock of crimson and gold rose a milk-white summit. The frequent fissures of this defile were filled with rich woods of oleander and shrubs of every shade of green, from which rose acacia, and other trees unknown to Tancred. Over all this was a deep and cloudless sky, and through it a path winding amid a natural shrubbery, which princes would have built colossal conservatories to preserve.

The book ends, but it has no conclusion. The great Asian mystery is not penetrated or explained. Disraeli had written

himself out, and the aposiopesis, with the announcement, "The Duke and Duchess of Bellamont had arrived at Jerusalem," interrupting the love scene with Eva, is on a par with the abrupt ending of *Vivian Grey*, or the abandonment of the debate between Lothair and the cardinal, in Disraeli's next book, when neither he nor the interlocutors could think of anything conclusive to say.

Such is the termination of Disraeli's most considerable *End of* work. *Coningsby* and *Sybil* give the history of the Conservative *the* party during its reconstruction, and a poignant statement *trilogy* of the social problem on its attitude to which the fortunes of that party depended; supplemented by *Tancred*, they set forth Disraeli's views on the policy and future of Conservatism. The Conservatives did not solve the problem laid before them in *Sybil*, though they paid it the serious attention that it had so far missed from unsympathetic Whigs and Tories. Nor would Disraeli's prescription have cured the patient. He borrowed Carlyle's thunder without participating in the moral ardour of Carlyle, who demanded, not mere political measures, but a moral revolution, a complete reversal of prevailing attitudes towards our human brethren. Perhaps such a revolution will never be consummated whilst man remains imperfect. At all events, Carlyle went to the root of the matter. But Disraeli's benevolent schemes were disabled by his apparently complacent and ostentatious admiration for wealth and splendour. His entranced vision of a stately and sacrosanct aristocracy is the apotheosis of caste; he widens instead of closing the gulf between the upper and the lower orders. He talked emptily of representation of the people, but seemed to mean, not extension of the franchise, not in the least universal suffrage, but representation through the Press—an idea that looks odd indeed in the present year of grace. "Then you abjure the Representative principle?" someone asks Coningsby.

"Representation is not necessarily, or even in a principal sense, Parliamentary. . . . Opinion is now supreme, and Opinion speaks in print. The representation of the Press is far more complete than the representation of Parliament.



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Parliamentary representation was the happy device of a ruder age," etc.<sup>1</sup>

Disraeli was prophetic in certain things, hazily prophetic, in *Tancred*, for example, in his vision of an Eastern empire. He was to enthrone an empress at Delhi; which, however, did not settle the question of India for all generations. Carlyle was a prophet in another sense, ingeminating eternal truths, though not always discerning their right application to the present. His predictions portend a Day of Judgment, and warn mankind that policies and politics of the Disraelian stamp are ephemeral, but the duties of man to man and the distinctions of right and wrong are eternal.<sup>2</sup>

"*Loth-  
air*"

Both Disraeli's later novels belong to the latter half of the century; they appeared respectively at the end of his first and of his second tenure of the office of Prime Minister. *Lothair* (1870), like *Tancred* twenty-three years before, is a romantic novel, with another fervid young believer making his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. But, in spite of its lofty and no doubt sincere idealism and some visionary incident, *Lothair* is Disraeli's finest comedy of English political society, with the satire well under control. The plot was suggested by the recent conversion of the third Marquess of Bute to the Roman Church. But the preface, with its echoes of *Tancred*, refers to the dangers Anglicanism had lately encountered from extremists in the Oxford Movement, and particularly to the secession of Dr Newman, which had "dealt a blow to the Church of England under which it still reels."

The tradition of the Anglican Church was powerful. Resting on the Church of Jerusalem, modified by the divine school of Galilee, it would have found that rock of truth which Providence, by the instrumentality of the Semitic race, had promised to St Peter. Instead of that, the seceders sought refuge in mediæval superstitions, which are generally only the embodiments of pagan ceremonies and creeds.

<sup>1</sup> Book VII., chap. ii.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Stephen makes short work of Disraeli's political teaching: "It was the creed of Young England, and even greater imaginative power might have failed in the effort to instil the most temporary vitality into that flimsy collection of sham beliefs" (*Op. cit.*, 367).

Several of the dramatis personæ are semi-historical: Cardinal Manning is courteously though ironically depicted in Cardinal Grandison, with a certain infusion of Wiseman; Capel, who figured in the Bute affair, was the original of the devoted and persistent Catesby; probably the sophisticated Father Coleman and Monsignor Berwick could be identified were it worth while, as the Garibaldian general has been identified; the English bishop is Wilberforce, who then held the see of Oxford, and the handsome duke with the brood of marriageable daughters is believed to be the Duke of Abercorn.<sup>1</sup> It would not profit to go further, and ask, for instance, who was St Aldegonde? Yet he, and the painter Gaston Phœbus, were assuredly from the life; such bundles of idiosyncrasies had a different origin from that of the pure devotee, Clare Arundel, or the grandiose Theodora, almost a feminine counterpart to Sidonia, with self-sacrificing heroism added.<sup>2</sup> These last are impressively but a little vaguely projected from Disraeli's intense imaginative realization of ideal qualities in action.

Lothair, another youthful inheritor of a splendid title and *The new* incalculable wealth, is an exquisitely ingenuous and earnest *hero* young fellow, like Coningsby, Egremont, or Tancred, determined to find the true path; but, even more than they, he has so much mental and moral sensitivity that he is entirely swayed by the outside influences contending for his decisions. One of his guardians, the clergyman who had been his father's trusted friend, has gone over to Rome and is now a cardinal. Given the religious and susceptible character of Lothair, he is sure at this date to be the object of a conspiracy to secure so illustrious a convert. Love theme and intellectual or spiritual theme are, as usual, united. Three ladies, in turn or in opposition, exercise a despotic influence over Lothair: Clare Arundel, who eventually becomes a nun; Theodora, representing natural religion, or at any rate, rejection of

<sup>1</sup> Monypenny and Buckle, v. 158.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Richard Garnett thought her "one of the noblest creations of a modern novelist"—"a Cytherea of flesh and blood," and others have shared his enthusiasm. Theodora is described as having great qualities; but, like that reservoir of great ideas Sidonia, she does not make her way as a living being from Disraeli's consciousness to ours (*Op. cit.*, 103-104).

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dogma; and the Anglican Corisande, least interesting of the three. His juvenile proposal to Corisande is a pretty incident of boyish enthusiasm, having a deeper implication in the retrospect, when, after many vacillations, he makes her his wife. The real tug of war is between the cardinal, backed by Catesby and Berwick, and the bishop, manfully aided by a large body of ladies, of whom Corisande is one of the least. The interviews between the parties engaged, especially those of Lothair and the cardinal, are battles of ideas, as much so as were the arguments in *Crotchet Castle* or *Gryll Grange*. Soon, the comedy widens out into a campaign of intrigue, social manœuvring, and the subtle interplay of private jealousies and rivalries, pieties and hypocrisies, agitating half the fashionable world, and, through the Press on both sides, stirring up the general public. But Lothair's soul is felt to be at stake; and the contest excites a shuddering suspense like that of a novel of terror. It comes to a climax when Lothair joins the Italian insurgents marching on Rome. The patriotic Theodora falls at Mentana; Lothair, desperately wounded, is picked up by the enemy and nursed by the priests. It is put about that he fell fighting for the Church, and that the peasant woman who rescued him was the Virgin in person. By a stratagem which he does not see through till too late, he is induced to take part in a solemn ceremony of thanksgiving for the miracle, and is almost hypnotized into the belief that his memory has betrayed him, or that his mind is unhinged, and that it is too late now to repudiate his alleged conversion. Virtually a prisoner in the great palace, he remonstrates in sheer desperation with the cardinal.

"I know there are two narratives of your relations with the battle of Mentana," observed the Cardinal quietly. "The one accepted as authentic is that which appears in this journal; the other account, which can only be traced to yourself, bears no doubt a somewhat different character; but considering that it is in the highest degree improbable, and that there is not a tittle of confirmatory or collateral evidence to extenuate its absolute unlikelihood, I hardly think you are justified in using, with reference to the statement in this article, the harsh

expression which I am persuaded, on reflection, you will feel you have hastily used."

Disraeli has to invoke a counter-miracle, the appearance of the ghost of Theodora in the ruins of the Colosseum, to re-establish Lothair's confidence; after which he escapes from the Romish toils, goes to Jerusalem, and at length returns to the arms of Corisande.

There are several daringly unconventional characters who *Humorous* enliven the more ordinary company in this novel, and the best *character-drawing* is Lord St Aldegonde. "Heir apparent of the wealthiest, if not the most ancient dukedom in the United Kingdom," he "held extreme opinions, especially on political affairs, being a republican of the reddest dye."

He was opposed to all privilege, and indeed to all orders of men, except dukes, who were a necessity. He was also strongly in favour of the equal division of all property, except land. Liberty depended on land, and the greater the landowners, the greater the liberty of a country. He would hold forth on this topic even with energy, amazed at anyone differing from him; "as if a fellow could have too much land," he would urge with a voice and glance which defied contradiction.

"The great object of St Aldegonde is not to be in society, and he has never succeeded in his object." But he was always to be trusted to say the wrong thing in any gathering, with an imperturbable grace which made it the more exasperating. The eminent painter, Mr Phœbus, living in Babylonian splendour on his Ægean isle and declaiming his principles of Aryan art, is amusing but a little stilted. After the loss of Theodora, Lothair is edified by another oracular sage, the mysterious Paraclete, suggested by Bunyan's Interpreter, who brings him back to a saner understanding of Christian beliefs. But the worldlings are, as usual, superior to the idealisms. Among the lesser figures, Mr Putney Giles, who lends the boy Lothair a hundred thousand without security, and nobly seconds his wife's social designs; and that wife, the indomitable Apollonia, whose "principal mission was to destroy the Papacy and to secure Italian unity," and

who organizes the vast train of festivities when Lothair comes of age and at the same time realizes all her ambitions, are not a whit inferior to the Guy Flounceys of Disraeli's earlier novels. Disraeli could rally snobbishness as pungently as Thackeray, and in his last novel was to twit Thackeray, very unfairly, as himself a victim to the propensity which he derided. But Thackeray could not have quizzed with more delicate irony the High Sheriff who had for a week been trembling with suspense lest his right of precedence even over the Lord Lieutenant should escape recognition.

When it was announced to Lothair that his Lordship's dinner was served, and he offered his arm to his destined companion, he looked around, and with a stateliness becoming such an incident, called upon the High Sheriff to lead the Duchess to the table. Although that eminent personage had been thinking of nothing else for days, and during the last half-hour had felt as a man feels, and can only feel, who knows that some public function is momentarily about to fall to his perilous discharge, he was taken quite aback, changed colour, and lost his head. But the band of Lothair, who were waiting at the door of the apartment to precede the procession to the hall, striking up at this moment *The Roast Beef of Old England*, reanimated his heart; and following Lothair, and preceding all the other guests down the gallery and through many chambers, he experienced the proudest moment of a life of struggle, ingenuity, vicissitude, and success.<sup>1</sup>

The Earl of Beaconsfield's last novel, *Endymion* (1880),

<sup>1</sup> Disraeli was one of those who take an almost childish delight in pomp and pageantry, and yet perceive the emptiness and childishness of it all. Hence he often upsets certain readers who cannot separate the studied gorgeousness from the irony. But, as Leslie Stephen observed, "this ambiguous hovering between two meanings, this oscillation between the ironical and the serious, is always amusing, and sometimes delightful." Stephen complains, however, that it is not always clear whether Disraeli is in earnest or satirical. "The gorgeous passages may be intentionally over-coloured, or may really represent his most sincere taste. His homage may be genuine or a biting mockery." It is best to remember the division in his mind; then the weakness and the mockery can both be appreciated in such a passage as the account of the Princess Tarpeia's jewels: "The Princess herself wore all those famous jewels which had been spared by all the Goths from the days of Brennus to those of Garibaldi, and on her bosom reposed the celebrated transparent cameo of Augustus, which Cæsar himself is said to have presented to Livia, and which Benvenuto Cellini had set in a framework of Cupids and rubies. If the weight of her magnificence were sometimes distressing, she had the consolation of being supported by the arm of Lothair."

published the year before his death, was not his least "*Endymion*" entertaining, and, though it did not yield the revelations that were eagerly awaited by thousands of readers, it was as rich in political and historical interest as those which had foreshadowed aims and programmes. Read as a chronological series, his novels provide a lively and illuminating version of English political and social history during his lifetime; they are also indirectly Disraeli's autobiography. Just as a lyrical poet lays bare his own spiritual history, so had Disraeli in novel after novel proclaimed his faith in himself and his country, and his hopes of the men and the forces surrounding him; and this in a lyrical fashion too, although his Semitic nature tended to give a false air of rodomontade to his impassioned substitute for lyricism. In his last novel he looks back upon that epoch and his own part in it, and with the aid of his stanch old ally Romance amuses himself in transfiguring it all into a story both like and unlike his own, taking the chief personalities with whom he has had dealings, altering them at will, and giving their careers a different ending to suit his fancy. He loved to assert, what was rather more than the truth, that he owed almost everything to women. In this unfettered recital, the Egerias with whom he had shared his confidences and taken invaluable counsel, the fairy princesses who had provided the wherewithal for his untrammelled application to politics, and the great ladies who had lent him influence and prestige, are the historical facts gratefully celebrated under fanciful disguises. In a blend of the true and the imaginary, he related another tale of victorious opportunism, the romance of an adventurer who is carried to the goal by the women who identify themselves with his interests. Left to his own efforts, Endymion would have been a nobody; he has less in him than Disraeli's most recent heroes, far less than his first, Vivian Grey. And he starts almost from zero, for his father came to grief in the downfall of the Wellington administration, committed suicide, and left the two children penniless. Myra, his twin sister, conscious of a "mystic bond" with Endymion, resolves to devote herself unreservedly to his fortunes.

"I never mean to embarrass him with a sister's love, and perhaps hereafter may see less of him even than I see now; but I shall be in the world, whatever be my lot, high or low—the active, stirring world—working for him, thinking only of him. Yes; moulding events and circumstances in his favour"; and she spoke with fiery animation. "I have brought myself, by long meditation, to the conviction that a human being with a settled purpose must accomplish it, and that nothing can resist a will that will stake even existence for its fulfilment."

The other women who help Endymion are of the same advice. Lady Montford, for instance, talking about his coming entry into Parliament, prophesies: "You will succeed, for everything in this world depends upon will." "I think everything in this world depends upon woman," said Endymion. "It is the same thing," said Berengaria.

*His  
portraits  
of  
women*

As a character in fiction, Myra, remarkable for "her total want of sensibility," is not very interesting; she is not even consistently drawn. But the story is that she has her way. She acquires influence and a position as the esteemed and trusted friend of the Neuchatels, the powerful bankers, who are the Rothschilds under another name; she gets into the world of politicians and men of affairs, marries an elderly nobleman who is in the Cabinet, and securing an under-secretaryship for her brother sets his feet on the ladder. Other women have a share in furthering her designs. Endymion is a favourite with the sex. Lady Montford, "the famous Berengaria, the Queen of Society, and the genius of Whiggism," is said to have been drawn from the Hon. Caroline Norton, who was to appear five years later, in Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*, in a very different guise. And Zenobia, Lady Beaumaris, the acknowledged leader of Tory society, is supposed to be a composite image of Lady Jersey and Lady Holland. But these magnificent creatures are personifications rather of the prestige and the commanding rôle played by great ladies in the palmy days of Whig and Tory predominance than literal portraits. These two, in particular, are thoroughly alive in comparison with the insensitive Myra, and show all that feminine charm in their relations with Endymion which

Disraeli knew how to impart. He delighted in the society of women, and was at his best in drawing those of mature experience.<sup>1</sup>

For it was on the intellectual side, by those faculties of *The* delicate perception and insight in which women excel, that they appealed most to Disraeli. He painted them with a *absence* kind of dispassionate tenderness. And in all the women whom *of* he drew with such brilliance there is a curious absence of the element most conspicuous in masculine portrayals of women much courted by men. The curious air of sexlessness in his love-*passion* tales has already been noticed. When he tried his hardest to tell a really passionate love-story, something invariably went wrong. In the world which his characters inhabit, personal relations seem to be adequately based on all other sorts of affinity but this. The lusts of the eye flourish there, for Disraeli, like Endymion's sister Myra,<sup>2</sup> luxuriated in brightness and colour; but any other corporeal lusts seem non-existent, except that some characters are distantly alluded to as gourmets. Does not this explain why his attempts to invoke a good orthodox passion, as in *Henrietta Temple*, were abortive, and why in Tancred's affair with the Rose of Sharon and in Lothair's with Clare Arundel, Theodora, and Corisande, the heat was entirely spiritual? In *Endymion*, the feminine influence is like that of the fairy godmother; and the wonder is that Disraeli contrived to make it so potent and all-sufficient. Berengaria, having buried her cold-blooded lord, who was merely not "a bad-hearted man" because "he had no heart," weds Endymion, who now meets with no obstacle to his ascent, and in due time becomes Prime Minister.

<sup>1</sup> "He had a great regard for girls, and his attitude towards them, or such of them as he elected heroines, was mostly one of adoration—magnificent yet a little awkward and strained. With women, married women, he had vastly more in common: he could admire, study, divine, without having to feign a warmer feeling; and while his girls are poor albeit splendid young persons, his matrons are usually delightful" (Henley, *op. cit.*, 27).

<sup>2</sup> "Lady Roehampton had a passion for light, provided the light was not supplied by gas or oil. Her saloons, even when alone, were always brilliantly illuminated. She held that the moral effect of such a circumstance on her temperament was beneficial, and not slight. It is a rare, but by no means a singular, belief" (chap. lxxvii.). Disraeli had the same susceptibility (Monypenny and Buckle, vi. 553 and 560). Light and colour are the characteristics of his best word-landscapes—*e.g.* in *Tancred*.



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Myra having lost her Lord Roehampton, that kindly adumbration of Palmerston, achieves a more brilliant destiny; she marries Florestan, and becomes a queen.

*The  
historical  
retro-  
spect*

In a manner more playful than serious, he first reviews the social, economic, and political movements down to the middle of the century, and the cold reception offered by the Tories to those improvements which in the second half were accepted as necessities of life. "Zenobia, who represented society, was enraptured that the career of revolution had been stayed." She mourned that, in an unguarded moment, the construction of a railway had been tolerated between Manchester and Liverpool.

"I have some good news for you," said one of her young favourites as he attended her reception. "We have prevented this morning the lighting of Grosvenor Square by gas by a large majority."

"I felt confident that disgrace would never occur," said Zenobia, triumphant. "And by a large majority! I wonder how Lord Pomeroy voted."

"Against us."

"How can one save this country?" exclaimed Zenobia. "I believe now the story that he has ordered Lady Pomeroy not to go to the Drawing Room in a sedan chair."

The Reform Act and all that followed, the growth of Radicalism, Chartism, Whig and Tory conflicts and cabals, the railway mania and the railway panic, the potato famine, Papal aggression and "the new Oxford heresy," and the translation of Manning to Rome, under the pleasing character of Nigel Penruddock, the splendid galanty show of the Eglinton tournament, and the picaresque adventures of Louis Napoleon in England under the incognito of Count Albert or Prince Florestan, are recounted in the style of a romance, and by no means of a historical novel. From the middle of the century onwards, the story becomes almost a fantasy, so freely does it embroider on the facts. The brilliant, opulent life of the Whig and Tory aristocracy, rivalled by that of the financial grandees, he depicted with what seems to be an instinctive relish; Disraeli's public liked it, and he gave it

them and enjoyed giving it, but with a gesture of only half-suppressed irony. Yet there are plenty of sharp sayings and grim aphorisms to be gleaned here and there, especially with a Count de Ferroll, sobriquet for Bismarck, on the same stage as Florestan; or when the shrewd Sergius, drawn after the Russian ambassador Baron Brunnow, holds the floor, and sometimes frightens and sometimes enlightens with the judgments of a long career in the most disillusioning profession.

"I should like to have power," said Endymion, blushing.

"The most powerful men are not public men," said the baron. "A public man is responsible, and a responsible man is a slave. It is private life that governs the world. You will find this out some day. The world talks much of powerful sovereigns and great ministers; and if being talked about made one powerful, they would be irresistible! But the fact is, the more you are talked about the less powerful you are."

Both the old statesman and the new are drawn with a penetrating realism that shrinks from nothing.

Disraeli's characters bear witness, at any rate, to his *Disraeli's* profound intellectual knowledge of mankind and his vast *short-comings* worldly wisdom, even if he has not imparted to many of them the gift of imaginative life. His knowledge of the world seems inexhaustible, it looks like omniscience; and his judgment and sagacity likewise appear infallible. So much for the intellectual side of his work. But, on the poetic side, though the need for imagination in all the affairs of life was one of his most urgent maxims, he had only the imagination that sees, not the imagination that creates. He never shows a character of his own invention conceiving and also performing a real act. Not the distractions of politics, but the lack of this essential faculty, was the reason why he could not be a great novelist. Knowledge and wisdom were at his command; but these were not enough. Certainly, he never makes any mistakes about character and motive; the reader feels that in this respect he is in safe hands. Yet Disraeli often reaches the end even of his knowledge, at any rate of his reasoned convictions, and has to stop. It is the creative imagination that gives out at the end of *Vivian Grey*

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and of *Tancred*, though the honest abrupt termination is immensely more satisfactory than the spuriousness with which a professional novelist would have padded out a symmetrical finish. But, even in exhibiting the conflict of ideas, he does not pursue it to a final decision. Peacock's satire was philosophical and conclusive; he went to first principles, and confuted fallacies. Disraeli's disputations are merely keen intellectuals sparring; a brilliant show of dialectic, paradox, romantic vision, wit and humour. But there is no finality; they are neither constructive nor destructive, in the long run. There is no long run with Disraeli. The arguments on both sides fail from sheer exhaustion. The political discussions in the trilogy lead nowhere.<sup>1</sup> The cardinal's breakdown in the interviews with Lothair is a case in point: he neither converts nor is controverted by his opponent; the discussion ends because neither can think of anything more to say. On the occasion when Lothair finds himself cornered, he has to be saved from the logical consequences by the illogical intervention of a ghost. Evidently, Disraeli knew when he too was cornered, and did not dissemble his limitations to himself. It is not a serious and profound study of politics that he gives in his novels; his chief contribution to political philosophy was his theory of opportunism. What he does give, and it is surely to be accepted with gratitude, is a panorama of political life in the age of aristocracy, by a political leader who knew all the secrets and had himself made history. His half-flippant, half-serious irony produced a mixture of homage and satire, which may be perplexing to the simple-hearted, but for the more sophisticated has almost the virtue of first-rate comedy.

*Lytton*

Lytton's historical fiction has been reviewed already.<sup>2</sup> It is time now to look at some of his novels that show certain points of comparison with the work of Disraeli, and at the most remarkable of many others in which Lytton tried nearly all the kinds of fiction then extant and improvised new ones of his own. Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer (1803-1873), made a baronet in 1838, took the additional name of Lytton in 1843,

<sup>1</sup> See Leslie Stephen's opinion (note on p. 170).

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 112-117.

on inheriting Knebworth from his mother, and was raised to the peerage in 1866 under the style of Baron Lytton of Knebworth. His career to a large extent ran parallel to Disraeli's; they made a very similar start, and had similar ambitions; the end was very different. Lytton is in Westminster Abbey, but not Disraeli. Yet the statesman's fame far outshines that of the man of letters; and, more paradoxical, even the statesman's novels, a mere parenthesis in his public career, are now seen to have more of the stuff of literary success in them than is to be discerned in all Lytton's multifarious poses and experiments. They were friends in early manhood, and friendly rivals in politics and literature, Lytton having the advantage of an earlier and better start. Lytton in 1832, then already in Parliament, helped Disraeli in his unsuccessful contest for Wycombe. At that time he was a Whig. Twenty years later, the "promising recruit whom the leadership of his friend Disraeli had attracted to the Conservative party"<sup>1</sup> received yeoman's service from that friend in getting back to the House as member for Hertfordshire. The tables were turned. He now belonged to "the forward school, or left wing of Conservatism"—that is, to the Young England party; and his "Letters to the Whigs" were reckoned the most brilliant articles in the campaign against the ideas of Cobden and Bright. Lytton found himself in the Cabinet with Disraeli (1858-1859), holding the office of Colonial Secretary; but after the Government's defeat he did not return to Parliament. The pair had been rivals in the literary world also. It was in Lytton's *New Monthly Magazine* that *Alroy* and *Ixion* had appeared. Disraeli spoke of *England and the English* as "a fine series of philosophic dissertations," though he considered Lytton "an overrated man," and said: "His mind is full of literature but no great power of thought." A few years later, in 1837, he told Lady Blessington that Lytton was "the only literary man whom I do not abominate and despise." Ultimately, the elder man was left far in the rear. Without the pecuniary resources which were provided for Disraeli at the most critical moments, he could not apply his energies exclusively to politics; he must write

<sup>1</sup> Monypenny and Buckle, iii. 492; the other quotations are from the same work.

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for a living.<sup>1</sup> In literature his brilliant versatility served him with his contemporaries, but has undone him with posterity.

*Lytton's assets and his liabilities* He was a man of great and a wide range of talent; a hard worker, and possessed of considerable staying powers. He could concentrate; he specialized and concentrated on too many interests in succession.<sup>2</sup> Poet, orator, politician, man of fashion, scholar, dramatist, novelist; he was successful in nearly all these rôles, up to a point. All has perished except his novels, and these are not proving substantial enough to stand the wear and tear of time. That which brought him immediate success and an almost world-wide reputation, his versatility and alert opportunism, has in the long run been his bane. Lytton wanted and needed money, and he found that he could make large sums with fiction adapted to the public taste. He held himself at the beck and call of opinion and the popular whims and fancies. He was continually changing his note, now in response to public demand, and now from his own eagerness to try some novelty and test his ability in some new field. He was the sort of man who might perhaps have never written novels at all, at an earlier or a later period, or if his circumstances had been different. But, in any case, he would have been a writer, and might possibly have achieved distinction of a less precarious kind.

*Genesis of "Falkland," etc.* In the fragmentary autobiography preserved in the *Life* by his grandson, Lytton records that his mother's friends looked upon him as "a youthful prodigy." At Cambridge, he won the Chancellor's medal for a prize poem. At home, he was always reading, and always studying to write, with the most illustrious models before his eyes. Boating on the lake or roaming the hills, he took his Shakespeare or his Euripides with him; and to these masters he attributed his craving "to investigate the springs of passion and analyse the human heart," and a love for "moralizing deductions and sententious

<sup>1</sup> The parting of the ways was as early as 1831, when he had to choose between literature and politics, and found himself compelled to refuse Lord Melbourne's offer of a minor post in the new Government (*Life*, by his Grandson, i. 492-495).

<sup>2</sup> As his grandson put it: "The range of his writing was extremely wide, and one might almost say that he emptied his mind into his books as fast as he filled it" (*Life*, by his Grandson, ii. 40). Yes, he read up each subject, and then very often was done with it.

aphorisms," even if they arrested the flow of action and narrative.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, he found in these authors sanction and encouragement for his innate tendency to brooding and self-questioning; he was a lonely youth, and they nourished his melancholy. He says little or nothing about his reading in the romantic poets, especially Byron, or of his acquaintance with the novels of Godwin and other members of the doctrinaire school, or of Mrs Radcliffe. But it must have been considerable, for these are the influences most conspicuous in his novels from the beginning. The cult of Byron was general among the young dandies of that era. Bulwer, aged sixteen, had had his tragic love affair; the girl had been taken away, had married, and was now dead. Right down to *What will he do with It?* (1858), he retold the tale in varying shapes in his novels. Now, at the age of twenty-one, his vanity and his Byronism were flattered by a sentimental liaison with Lady Caroline Lamb, the very year of Byron's death. There is colour for the suggestion that he was posing to himself, and to his readers, as a disillusioned and embittered Byron, all the time he was meditating *Falkland*, *Pelham*, and *The Disowned*.<sup>2</sup> In 1826, at the age of twenty-three, he says that he had in hand "three light prose works and one poetical tale," with another book, which must have been the still inchoate *England and the English*. The one called "a sort of Werter taken from fact" was no doubt *Falkland*; and collation with an earlier passage in the autobiography makes it clear that one of the light pieces was "Mortimer," which had been in hand already two years before and was presently to be used as the groundwork of *Pelham*.<sup>3</sup> He must have been reading *Caleb Williams* about this time, and have had no wish to conceal the loans about to be made from that strangely provocative book of Godwin's—Godwin with whom he was soon to be brought into closer contact. *Falkland*, in that novel, is the haughty gentleman who murders Tyrrel; the question who killed Tyrrel sets the tragic ball rolling.<sup>4</sup> Lytton borrowed the name and something of the character of *Falkland* in his first novel, and the question

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, by his Grandson, i. 57, 88–89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>4</sup> See Volume V. 245–246.

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who was the murderer of another Tyrrel puts everything in the balance in the melodramatic section of *Pelham*. The pessimism and over-sensibility of crude egoism working in *Falkland* made little appeal; the book received no attention except from his intimates, and they were repelled by its loose morals and irreligion. "It has horror-stricken the Prudes and Canters," he wrote to a friend; and all he could do in extenuation some years later was to say again, that it was a sort of *Werter*, in which "I had rid my bosom of the perilous stuff." The novel was censored by himself, and excluded from his collected works.

"*Pelham*"

It has been remarked<sup>1</sup> that Plumer Ward's *Tremaine* had a good deal to do with the writing of *Vivian Grey*; and Disraeli's novel probably started Lytton upon *Pelham, or Adventures of a Gentleman* (1828). But *Pelham*, which is a better book than *Vivian Grey*, though like this it has two different sides, which are combined, however, instead of falling apart, owes quite as much to the stimulus of Lister's smart sketches of a frivolous society in *Granby*. And the debts could not have been very serious, if Lytton had made much progress with his "Mortimer" before either of these books had appeared, as he avers.<sup>2</sup> Politics come into the story; an election is staged, together with an attempt to secure place and influence without the sacrifice of integrity and independence. The political doctrines canvassed are those of Bentham, Mill, and Ricardo; for Bulwer at this date was a Radical. But politics tend to be crowded out by the adventures of the young men about town, and the scenes in unrefined society, "that motley mixture of the *fashionably low* and the vulgarly *genteel*"—to reproduce the autobiographer's italics. For Lytton was one of those novelists who find it difficult to escape the autobiographical form, and still more difficult not to depict themselves in their heroes. And this in spite of his sincere endeavours to reproduce in *Pelham* the features and spirit of his boon companion, Frederick Villiers, whose masterly handling of a pompous English general at Boulogne, and the bloodless duel which formed the sequel,

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 143 and n. "Tremaine was the chief impulse to *Vivian Grey*, and *Vivian Grey* must bear a large part of the responsibility for the existence of *Pelham*" (Sadleir, 117).

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 183.

are the subject of some of the merriest pages in the *Life*. Like Villiers, Pelham is a conceited young fop, with sterling qualities beneath the flashy exterior. "What a damnation puppy!" Mr Aberton exclaims; "and everyone, even to Madame de G——s, seemed to consider me impertinent enough to become the rage!" The traits of morbid self-consciousness which presently emerge may be traced to the writer, not to the model. As he himself put it, the contradictions in Villiers, "aristocrat by temper, democrat by reason, assisted me in finishing and completing the character of Pelham."<sup>1</sup> How much was added by Lytton the reader may easily surmise. He also added to the episodes of dandyism the Godwinian story of a criminal outrage, the attempt at revenge which is forestalled by a blackleg and robber, and the question of the guilt or innocence of Pelham's friend, Sir Richard Glanville. Glanville, whose "habits of luxury and expense, the energy of his mind, the solitude, the darkness, the hauteur, the reserve," are the subject of a solemn comparison with Wallenstein, though Falkland, in the previous novel, would have been more to the point, is committed for trial, and would have been hanged, had not Pelham secured the evidence which brings home the guilt to the right man. Pelham is overjoyed to learn that Glanville, brother of the girl he loves, is not guilty of murder, disregarding the awkward fact that Glanville was trying to force his enemy to a duel, with intent to slay him. Better to turn back from these melodramatic and casuistical chapters to the earlier, which are the most spontaneous and the least affected that our novelist ever wrote. The straight plunge into the middle of things in the first chapter has often been quoted: he never improved upon it, nor upon the succinct history of the interrupted elopement.

The carriage was at the end of the square. My mother, for the first time in her life, got up at six o'clock. Her foot was on the step, and her hand next to Mr Conway's heart, when she remembered that her favourite china monster, and her French dog, were left behind. She insisted on returning—re-entered the house, and was coming downstairs with one under each arm, when she was met by my father and two servants. My father's

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, by his Grandson, i. 133.



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valet had discovered the flight (*I forget how*), and awakened his master.

The pose of light-hearted mischief that elders called wickedness is only the transparent cynicism of youth. *Pelham* was enormously successful; it "was read with avidity throughout Europe." It changed the fashions in dandyism. Evening dress in any colour that suited the fancy of the wearer was discarded for the black coat, which still survives. Lytton, many years later, claimed that "it put an end to the Satanic Mania" and to the Byronic craze<sup>1</sup>; but he forgot that he was still to publish *The Disowned* and *Godolphin*. Tory reviewers, however, in *Fraser's Magazine* and elsewhere, scented the danger of his satire combined with political criticism from the Radical point of view, and did not fail of reprisals. Carlyle's exaggerated denunciation in *Sartor Resartus*<sup>2</sup> betrays a curious obtuseness to the humour of the book.

"*Paul Clifford*" With extravagant tastes which he did not repress and an extravagant wife to maintain,<sup>3</sup> Lytton had to keep his pen hard at it, in articles for the periodicals and in fiction; and, although *Falkland* had brought him not even credit, he relapsed in *The Disowned* (1828), and almost as badly in his first historical novel, *Devereux* (1829),<sup>4</sup> into the same false and declamatory romanticism, and so-called metaphysics, which he could pour out so fluently.<sup>5</sup> The story is laid in the latter part of the eighteenth century; but, instead of taking some pains with the local colour, as he really did in depicting the age of Anne in *Devereux*, he let all that go, and eked out a crude plot with love memories of his own and a rehash of his adventures with the gipsies, when he is said to have gone through the flash ceremony of marriage with one of the tribe. He struck out an exalted and very definite line

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, 348-349.

<sup>2</sup> Book III., chap. x.

<sup>3</sup> *Life*, by his Grandson, i. 207 and 216.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> There was unintentional point in the old caretaker's remark—she had nursed him at Copped Hall—"In one of his attacks of fluency I nursed him there for many weeks." She probably meant pleurisy; but "fluency" hits the mark (*Life*, by his Grandson, ii. 493).

in the next novel, *Paul Clifford* (1830), a line which was regarded as peculiarly his own, though it was but the resultant of the mutual impact of his mind and Godwin's. Lytton revered the author of *Caleb Williams* as a champion of human rights, who had already had his say on social injustices, and would be at one with himself in the condemnation of the existing penal code and the demoralizing effects of "a vicious prison discipline." Felonies of a petty description were at that time still punishable by death; in the seven years 1819-1825 no less than 7770 persons received this sentence in England and Wales.<sup>1</sup> But the attack was directed at the effect of an evil environment in creating criminals. Paul states Lytton's case in his speech to the judge at his trial for robbery: "Your laws are but of two classes; the one makes criminals, the other punishes them. I have suffered by the one—I am about to perish by the other." He pleads that he was taken up when a boy for an offence he did not commit, herded with thieves, and by the demoralization which was the result set on his criminal career.<sup>2</sup> But Lytton's case is not watertight. Paul's comrades, Tomlinson, author of "Maxims on the Popular Art of Cheating," and Long Ned, the rascally son of Lawyer Pepper and grandson of a religious writer, were not pitiable victims of social regulations, but gentlemen cutpurses who loved the highway for its sporting chances and its rollicking hours of leisure. They and the rest of the crew are Adelphi highwaymen, spouting Bulwerian æsthetics. It is their nature, so far as they have a nature, to go to the dogs. Hence the culminating scene, adapted from a famous one in Mrs Inchbald's *Nature and Art*,<sup>3</sup> misses the mark. Clifford is tried by Judge Brandon, an able lawyer but in private life a whited sepulchre. Brandon more than half suspects that Paul Clifford is really and truly his own

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, i. 361-362; Sadleir (224) cites the case of a man sentenced to death in 1830 for stealing a mare belonging to Mrs E. B. Bulwer-Lytton.

<sup>2</sup> "Young people are apt, erroneously, to believe that it is a bad thing to be exceedingly wicked. The House of Correction," says Lytton sarcastically, "is so called because it is a place where so ridiculous a notion is invariably corrected."

<sup>3</sup> See Volume V. 251-252; Sadleir (225) throws doubt on the larceny from Mrs Inchbald. Exact correspondence in the sex and situation of the victims is, of course, not to be looked for.

kidnapped son, when he steels his heart to condemn him. The strain kills Brandon; but Paul gets his reprieve, and marries the gentlewoman who rejected a lord and loved Paul for his daring and magnanimity. The story is well constructed in a highly artificial way; this artifice, like the thieves' cant and the picaresque lore borrowed from glossaries and the popular manuals and story-books of shady life, or the profuse rhetoric, which overflows into the exordium to every chapter, is that of a professional novelist who has had to work up a case. The book was almost as successful as Gay's *Beggar's Opera* had been, the sale being helped materially by the publishers' assurance that many of the best-known people, from the king downwards, were identifiable among the rascals sharing out the booty.<sup>1</sup> It helped the philanthropists to bring about the reforms most needed; it also started a fashion in the romance of crime and rascality which gave Harrison Ainsworth's *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard* to the world, and was not without effect upon Dickens—witness, for example, *Oliver Twist*.<sup>2</sup>

"Eugene  
Aram" *Eugene Aram, a Tale* (1832), is a more sombre book than *Paul Clifford*, which was in the light-hearted tradition of picaresque literature, except in the polemics. Here, Lytton attempts comic relief in the episode of Walter Lester's journey in search of his long-lost father; but, otherwise, the story is as gloomy as Hood's well-known poem, which appeared three years before the novel, and it is only darkened by the strained sentimental analysis of the sinner's brooding mind. The facts were notorious; a report of the trial had been often reprinted, and had figured in chap-books and broadsheets; Lytton's interest was intensified by his hearing that Aram had formerly given lessons to the Bulwer family in his grandfather's house at Heydon.<sup>3</sup> He first proposed to use the

<sup>1</sup> See a key quoted by Sadleir (227-228).

<sup>2</sup> Thackeray probably wrote the review of *Rookwood* in *Fraser's Magazine* (June 1834), in which he compares Ainsworth and Bulwer: "With Mr Ainsworth all is natural, free, and joyous: with Mr Bulwer all is forced, constrained, and cold. Ainsworth is always thinking of—or rather with—his hero: Bulwer is always thinking of himself." This, quoted from S. M. Ellis (*Harrison Ainsworth*, i. 259), is shrewd and not untrue, though put with Thackeray's usual bias against Bulwer-Lytton.

<sup>3</sup> See preface to 1840 edition, and *Life*, by his Grandson, i. 386-387.

subject in a play; but gave this up half finished, publishing the fragment, however, in the *New Monthly Magazine*, where it caught the eye of Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn-law Rhymer.<sup>1</sup> After publishing the novel, he talked about it with William Godwin, who had himself once entertained the notion of making this story "the foundation of a novel"; as Lytton observes, it would have befitted his "dark and inquiring genius." "The moral," he says in the preface, "consisted in showing more than the mere legal punishment at the close." It was to demonstrate how it blighted the man's humanity, cut him off from all social confidence, slew his ambition, and made his intellect barren. Lytton regarded his novel as a philosophical study of the case. It is far indeed from being a plain, realistic account; he was too sensible of the solemnity and dignity proper to such a serious subject. Hence the chief character, and others, talk like a book of elegant extracts:

"Ah!" said Aram, gently shaking his head, "it is a hard life we bookmen lead! Not for us is the bright face of noon-day or the smile of woman, the gay unbending of the heart, the neighing steed, and the shrill trump; the pride, pomp, and circumstance of life."

Lytton pleaded that the motive for the deed was no sordid one, but the craving for knowledge, and Aram's aspiration to dedicate his life to noble ends. This sentimental treatment of the issues in a well-known story, and the appeal for sympathy with the criminal, enthralled a host of readers all over the civilized world,<sup>2</sup> but exasperated the critics, one of whom observed sarcastically that the object was to show, "How Eugene Aram, though a thief, a liar, and a murderer, yet being intellectual was amongst the noblest of mankind."<sup>3</sup> Lytton subsequently changed the ending, making Aram leave a confession behind, in which he affirms that he did not strike the blow, and even tried to ward it off. But the doctrine of predestination propounded in the guilty man's reverie

<sup>1</sup> Elliott's excited and enthusiastic letter of acknowledgment is also given there (387-388).

<sup>2</sup> On Lytton's popularity in Germany, France, and the United States, see Sadleir, 360-362.

<sup>3</sup> Thackeray.

renders this a question of small significance: "All must walk onward to their goal. . . . The colours of our existence were doomed before our birth—our sorrows and our crimes. . . . What, then, is crime?—Fate! What life?—Submission."

"*Godolphin*,"  
 "Ernest  
*Maltravers*,"  
 and  
 "*Alice*"

At the same time as he was writing this, Lytton was also at work upon *Godolphin* (1833), which, with *Ernest Maltravers* (1837) and its sequel, *Alice, or the Mysteries* (1838), is regarded by his admirers as a more unadulterated revelation of his heart and mind than any other of his writings, except *Pelham*. All three were anonymous, like the rest of the foregoing with the dubious exception of *Paul Clifford*, which bore the initials E.B.L. In fact, he took special pains to conceal his authorship of *Godolphin*, until the issue of a cheap edition in 1840.<sup>1</sup> The result was exactly the reverse of Lever's experience in the anonymous competition with himself in *Con Cregan*, which straightway outsold his fully authenticated novel, *The Daltons*: *Godolphin* sold very badly. The public were bewildered by this cloudy portrayal of self-tormenting individualism at strife with a world which they did not recognize for the world they knew. In depicting its hollow splendours, follies, and falsehoods, Lytton combined something of the dark psychology of Godwin's later novels and the stagy romanticism of Mrs Radcliffe with a fantastic mysticism of his own. His passion for the occult is in a line with Disraeli's mystical bent, though not the same thing; just as his inflated rhetoric was his own substitute for a lyrical prose. *Godolphin* is shapeless and incoherent, in comparison with *Ernest Maltravers* and its sequel, in which a complicated story is unfolded with the skill of a practised dramatist, for Lytton had now produced two plays, *The Duchesse de la Vallière*, which was a failure, and *The Lady of Lyons*, one of his successes; *Richelieu* and *Money* were soon to follow. But there is no need to summarize a sensational story. Disraeli's plots were not much in themselves, but they had some ulterior significance. It is rather in the passing comment and in the characters who are the mouthpieces of his antipathies or his ideals that Lytton's novels are revealing. And the philosophy propounded was

<sup>1</sup> His elaborate masquerade is described by Sadleir (307-312).

soon to be obsolete. He was to outgrow the Rousseauist sociology and the philosophy of primitivism embodied in Alice Darvil, the child of nature, and also the crude version of German rationalism in Ernest Maltravers, the philosopher's quest of spiritual happiness.

He gave a more definite account of his individualistic "*England* philosophy in *England and the English* (1833), the first part <sup>and the</sup> dedicated to Talleyrand—a straightforward enunciation of <sup>English</sup> his views which has much the same central significance in his intellectual history as the Coningsby trilogy in Disraeli's. It is a comparative analysis of the English character; to which, in the 1834 edition, Lytton added a long survey of recent affairs, shrewd, trenchant, and enlivened by strokes of unaffected humour. He avows his allegiance to Bentham, the long-standing neglect of whom is deplored. The English dislike theory, and pay inordinate deference to practical men. But "practical men are prejudiced men." The unpopularity of Bentham's *Popular Fallacies* "are (*sic*) a proof of the unpopularity of truths." "The Middle Classes interest themselves in grave matters: the aggregate of their sentiments is called OPINION. The great interest themselves in frivolities, and the aggregate of their sentiments is termed FASHION. The first is the mental representation of the popular mind, the last of the aristocratic." He is severe on the aristocracy, and castigates the Lords for their stupid resistance to the Reform Bill, and their ungracious surrender when it could be no longer obstructed. But he is not less caustic on the money-barons who have gained admittance to these exclusive circles, and the apes of fashion who feebly copy both. Class-consciousness and snobbery are among the most pernicious of our social follies, and are at their worst in the great gulf which they tend to establish between the poorer classes and all above them. He was peculiarly irked by the disdain or mere disregard paid to the man of letters, with whom he would associate the artist and the scientist. "Literary men have not with us any settled position." How different from the homage paid in foreign countries! This leads on to a discussion of the novel of manners, and the part

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it plays in the service of fashion, to which it will be necessary to refer later; and to a dissertation, in the spirit of his age, on the plastic arts, with a glowing tribute to the sublime John Martin, who is placed above Poussin and Domenichino. But in matters of practical politics, Lytton is often in advance of his age, and nowhere more so than in his contempt for the existing public-school system, and his suggestions for improving education.

"Night  
and  
Morning"

After the gingerbread fantasy of *The Pilgrims of the Rhine* (1834), his historical novels, *The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Rienzi*, and his emotional *Ernest Maltravers* and *Alice*, Lytton published *Night and Morning* (1841), a compendious example of his thoroughly modernized Gothic, which, however, was only a mild prelude to the terrifying *Zanoni*. It is a romance of sensation pure and simple, with few pretensions to realism, beyond the seasoning of fact that gives a vague air of probability. But Lytton has such a habit of cutting every perplexing knot with the razor of coincidence that all the laws of probability may as well be considered null and void. It is the long story of two sons of a wealthy man who had married in secret, with the result that they are supposed to be illegitimate. Hairbreadth escapes in England, and more complicated and blood-curdling adventures abroad, come to an end at last with the unearthing of the marriage certificate and the recovery of the estate. Character-drawing there is none, unless the coiner and swindler Gawtrey, and Favart the police agent, be excepted, both, at any rate, terrifying creations. The death of Gawtrey in trying to escape from the police by a rope hooked across the street seems reminiscent of the ghastly death-scene of Bill Sikes. *Oliver Twist* had come out three years earlier.

"Zanoni"

There is terror enough of a tangible kind in *Night and Morning*; but *Zanoni* is more ambitious, for its horrors are almost all of the intangible kind. Even to-day, for readers who are able to suspend for the time being their scientific scepticism, it still perhaps hits the mark. Apart from his one orthodox ghost-story, this is Lytton's finest effort in the supernatural. And it might even be pronounced orthodox, being only an unusually daring adaptation of the time-honoured theme of the

wanderer labouring under the ban of immortality; in short, only a variant of the old legend of Ahasuerus. Lytton was thoroughly versed in all such lore; he was a genuine Rosicrucian, an adept in magic, astrology, palmistry, and the rest of the black arts. He had kept watch in haunted chambers, and no doubt experienced, dreaming or waking, all the ghastly sensations which he succeeds in making so actual.<sup>1</sup> He had been preparing to write the book for some time, though he said that the outlines of the story came to him in a dream; *Zicci*, the preliminary sketch, appeared four years earlier, and is still extant in his collected works.<sup>2</sup> Zanon and his master Mejnour are the sole surviving members of a brotherhood who ages ago won the gift of immortality, which they retain on the stern condition of never yielding to the call of human sympathy. But, after five thousand years of unruffled bliss, Zanon falls in love with a child of earth, and at the height of the Reign of Terror resigns his sublime privilege to save her. Lytton surpassed himself in conceiving his dreadful minister of celestial, or infernal, justice, the Dweller of the Threshold, a shapeless and impalpable monster, clutching darkly out of space at the mortal delinquent. Both Zanon and this mysterious being have the ghastly, intolerable eyes which were traditional in legends of the Wandering Jew.

Between *The Last of the Barons* (1843) and *Harold* (1848), Other Lytton published another apologetic study of crime, *Lucretia, stories of or Children of the Night* (1847), dealing with the career of <sup>the super-</sup> Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, virtuoso and poisoner; and <sup>natural</sup> then, after striking out a new line in *The Caxtons* and his other novels of quiet English family life, he returned to the supernatural in a magazine tale, *The Haunted and the Haunters* (1859), which appeared in *Blackwood*, and *A Strange Story* (1862), a novel of ordinary length which he had used as a serial in *All the Year Round*. In both, he employs devices as old as Defoe and Swift, to pass the incredible off as literally true, and excite the sensations of horror which the actuality would have evoked.

<sup>1</sup> See *Life*, by his Grandson, ii. 39-50, on his study of magic. "He was under no illusions regarding" psychical phenomena; but it is to be gathered from the account of his interest and researches that he kept an open—and a very receptive—mind.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.



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*The Haunted and the Haunters, or the House and the Brain*, takes the shape and style of a plain report of certain extraordinary occurrences. The place where these occur is ordinary enough, and within a stone's-throw of the most-frequented street in London. Beginning with a matter-of-fact account of the empty house in the street to the north of Oxford Street, said to be haunted and accordingly marked down by the investigator interested in such matters, the tale goes on with the man's determined preparations to test the case, the fearless character of his servant, the brute courage of the dog, who is presently to die in convulsions of terror. With these preliminaries, the mysterious things they experience, the furniture that shifts as if moved by unknown hands, the half-visible scamper of the child across the room, the fingers that clutch at the faded letters, the benumbing atmosphere, from which peer fascinating serpent eyes and human outlines shape themselves dimly, excite a horror the contagion of which there is no resisting. It is an instance in which the explanation intensifies instead of dissipating the impression on the senses. Pitting his will against the haunters, the man traces the spells to their source in a room where persistent malevolence, a curse two centuries old, has condensed itself in a magic vessel, a loadstone, and other apparatus, the medium of such half-talismanic forces as magnetism, mesmerism, and thought-transference, then, whether genuine or spurious, accepted as mysterious powers bordering on the supernatural. Lytton employed more indirect means of authenticating the marvels related in *A Strange Story* (1862), the chief witness being, by nature, education, and profession, a sceptic. Dr Fenwick doubts the evidence of his senses; he fights desperately against conviction; and the artifice is kept up in the case of Dr Faber and the stern and sarcastic woman of the world, Mrs Colonel Poyntz. An atmosphere of hard scientific hostility to any kind of glamour is sedulously prepared; and, paradoxically, helps materially to sustain the illusion. Thus the reader is prepared to accept that mysterious being Margrave, and Fenwick's contest with his influence for the possession of his bride, though left in doubt whether Margrave be the reincarnation of Louis Grayle, Louis

Grayle himself, his life renewed, or a being of altogether different nature. On the other hand, the novelist weakens instead of fostering belief by introducing the stage jugglery of magic wands, rings and pentacles, and mystic incantations. Nor do the pages upon pages of emotive reasoning, the vague "metaphysics," and the sham physical science, help the illusion, at any rate now. Miracles are subsidiary in Lytton's Utopian romance, *The Coming Race* (1871), in which sociological thought brings him within measurable comparison with Disraeli, and satire, or at least paradox, into distant relationship with Peacock. It preceded Butler's *Erewhon* by a year, and in humour, though not in ingenuity, falls considerably short. This happy republic was established ages ago by a branch of the human race lost below the surface of the earth, where, controlled by an irresistible force, free from war and all violent passions, they have developed a higher order of civilization and of mechanical art.

Lytton once more evinced opportunism and versatility rather *Realistic* than any genuine impulse, when he began his professed *novels*—delineations of "Varieties in English life" with *The Caxtons* <sup>"The Caxtons"</sup> (1849), following it up with *My Novel* (1853) and *What will he do with It?* (1858). It was the moment when Thackeray, Mrs Gaskell, and Charlotte Brontë, not to mention Dickens and the still unfledged Trollope, were before the world and revolutionizing English fiction; yet, whilst he evidently regarded himself as competing with them, it was ostentatiously to Sterne that he had recourse for the manner of presenting these "records of ordinary life,"<sup>1</sup> and to his unregenerate self for the emotional romance of the prodigal Vivian, who strikes such tender fire from the flinty heart of his father, Uncle Roland. The blend of didactics is also Lytton's own; and he had by no means renounced his cloudy philosophy of the Real and the Ideal, which is interpreted by Trevanion, and brings forth fruit in the high-souled Sedley Beaudesert. No doubt, in *The Caxtons*, which has the form of memoirs and is called "A Family Picture," he accommodated his waywardness as closely as he could to something like the realism of Thackeray. But the

<sup>1</sup> Preface.

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effort was too much for him, he had to strike an attitude and adopt a mood, and the nearest he could arrive at was Sterne's playful distortion of the ordinary. At all events, he produced a clever imitation: every one of the studied eccentricities is there.

The two elder Caxtons, "my father" and his brother Roland, are a toned-down, Victorian Mr Shandy and Uncle Toby. Both duly have bees in their bonnets, both love each other tenderly and are distressed at the number of agitating subjects on which they stand at opposite poles. Mr Caxton, with the tame duck and his sovereign medicine for the mind, the *Life of Robert Hall*, believes in the family descent from William Caxton, and therefore devotes his enthusiasms to fine printing; the soldierly one-legged Roland is certain that they derive from an ancient knightly house, and that a confusion has occurred between the printer and one Sir William de Caxton, who was killed at Bosworth Field. His gentle spirit waxes hot on the question of William Caxton and the invention of printing. "Sir, chivalry ceased when the press rose!" he shouts at the end of one tirade. One of Roland's eccentricities, however, is a firm belief that man derives his more intellectual faculties from the female side; hence his politeness to woman, of whatever class. All these crotchets are suitably developed, and the whimsical style assumed for the occasion is, strange to say, plainer and even more natural than Lytton's customary rhetoric. Of sentimentality there is enough, and many a deliberate and overt stroke of pathos, with the appropriate tears; though Lytton affects a stern repression of feeling when, for instance, the existence of Roland's scapegrace son is unfortunately mentioned.

"He is dead," cried your father, in his kind pitying voice. "Dead to me, brother,—and you will never mention his name!" You should have seen how stern your uncle looked. I was terrified.

Uncle Jack, Mr Squills, and Mr Tibbets might have been met at Shandy Hall; and also the plump maid-servant whose pail got in the way of Uncle Roland's cork leg, and so strained his deference to the sex that he was distinctly heard to ejaculate:

"Would to Heaven she was a creature in breeches!"

This is one of the passages in which the visual and pictorial manner of Sterne's impressionism is successfully assumed<sup>1</sup>; another is when Roland receives the letter which he at first protested could not be for him:

Ah! it has stung or bit you, Captain Roland! for you start and change colour—you suppress a cry as you break the seal—you breathe hard as you read—and the letter seems short—but it takes time in the reading, for you go over it again and again. Then you fold it up—crumple it—thrust it into your breast pocket—and look round like a man waking from a dream. Is it a dream of pain, or of pleasure? Verily, I cannot guess, for nothing is on that eagle face either of pain or pleasure, but rather of fear, agitation, bewilderment. Yet the eyes are bright, too, and there is a smile on that iron lip.

Had it not been done so much better already, all this would have been a brilliant feat. But Victorian prudishness thought Sterne indelicate; so Lytton's second-hand performance was accepted as not less good in quality, and infinitely better as being "on the side of the angels."<sup>2</sup>

Peisistratus is the author in *My Novel, or Varieties of English* "*My Life*", and there is a chorus of Caxtons. The subtitle is *Novel*<sup>3</sup> perfunctorily justified by a sprinkling of moneylenders and their prey, a vulgar, self-made Americanized Englishman, Richard Avenel; some Italian patriots and plotters with their enemies and betrayers; and a few humble tradespeople and representatives of the peasant classes. Otherwise, this is a broad panorama of the squirearchy and those of higher degree, with glimpses of London fashionables and dissipations of some social standing. Political life is glanced at, Parliament itself coming in, with scenes at the hustings, sittings of caucuses, and rowdy meetings at election times. But the prevailing atmosphere is of country life rather, and the tone more like Fielding than Sterne, although the active and

<sup>1</sup> See Volume IV. 263-264.

<sup>2</sup> For a contemporary appreciation of Lytton's mimicry of Sterne, see *Novels and Novelists* (1858) by J. Cordy Jeaffreson, vol. ii. 213-214. As to Jeaffreson's general criticism, it is safe to say that he knew what was bad, if he did not always recognise what was good.

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effective influence came probably from Dickens and Trollope. Bluff Squire Hazeldean, however, has more than a spice of Squire Western; Leonard Fairfield is, in situation at least, another Tom Jones; Randal Leslie plays just such another part as Blifil's; and Miss Jemima might have been suggested by Miss Allworthy. Perhaps it is not altogether fanciful to detect too close an assimilation to Partridge in the Italian Riccabocca, the poor Duke di Serrano; and, surely, the impressive Audley Egerton, statesman and patriot, the soul of integrity and devotion, may stand for Allworthy, although the double rôle assigned to this character in the plot ruins verisimilitude: such a man would never have abandoned Nora. There are indeed many improbabilities in the account of Egerton's deception of his bosom friend Lord L'Estrange, the clandestine marriage, and the tragic sequel. Yet there is much both touching and poetical in this image of Nora, the neglected and heart-broken wife, haunting the background of the story, with the pathetic discovery of her manuscript poems—an incident that enforces a strong likeness to Emily Brontë. Surely, Lytton knew that story. This is but one thread in a double or triple plot, which is skilfully, nay, brilliantly conducted, though it has several loose knots. Lytton had by now often succumbed to the temptation of such melodramatic devices, to which the truth of character-drawing and the laws of probability had to give way. The result, both in this and the next book, is to set the reader puzzling his brains, not so much about what is to happen next, as to conjecture from the data before him how the author can possibly find a way out of the imbroglio. The mere plot novel becomes, not a fictitious history bearing significantly upon real life, but a mere intellectual puzzle—the reader is set doing cat's-cradles. As a melodramatic story, *My Novel* has many strong situations; for example, the recapture of Violante, at the very moment when the nefarious Count di Peschiera has her in his toils aboard the yacht, which he has every reason to believe his own property, though the vessel has been secretly pre-empted by Lord L'Estrange. This is followed at once by a general exposure

of the machinations, unmasking of all the villainy, and the discomfiture of "Blifil" Leslie. Presumably, such a termination is to show "The still spirit of Intellectual Evil" worsted with her own weapons; though, after all, a much more ordinary collection of human beings, engaged in much less extraordinary transactions, might have illustrated the conflict between the Ideal and the Actual with equal effect. Sober realism and melodrama are not good mixers.

Peisistratus Caxton is introduced again as the author in "*What Will he do with It?*" This also boasts a complicated plot; and Lytton has to exert all his powers of manipulating events and providing coincidences to bring about, in spite of appearances and of the expectations of all who do not appreciate his secret determination not to be baffled, a genteel marriage. For the characters, who rivet sympathy from the outset—that is, from the opening picture which Stevenson singled out as admirable,<sup>1</sup> of the motley crowd at the village fair, and the little girl dancing in the booth, with her grandfather close at hand, and divers prospective actors in the plot looking on—are such as would seem the unlikeliest to have any connexion with the upper classes. Who Waife really is and what is his past, and Sophy's parentage and why she has to earn a living for herself and him in a travelling show, with the antecedents and relationships of others not yet introduced to the reader, are questions to be worked out partly by the pedestrian method of narrative, and partly by a larger measure of analysis applied to certain characters than is usual in Lytton's novels. The analysis is combined with that discursive casuistry to which he was addicted, his so-called "metaphysics," which involves an immense amount of word-spinning and does not carry more conviction here than elsewhere. Guy Darrell, the man of refined culture and

"a prodigious mind—it is of granite—"

whose character and place in the story are much the same as those of Audley Egerton in the last; the villainous Jasper Losely, the enigmatic Mrs Crane, and Lady Montfort, are

<sup>1</sup> "A Gossip on Romance."

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subjected to this scrutiny before they give up secrets to which they do not always hold the key. The analysis has a double purpose to serve: to elucidate irregularities of action and motive, and enable the reader to grasp the connexions of a strange entanglement.

The only unmistakable vestige of Sterne is the third chapter of the third book, headed "Dénouement," which consists of one word—"Poodle!"—Sophy's beloved dog, who ought to have had the last word in the last sentence of the previous chapter, is thus formally introduced. But the influence of Lytton's friend Dickens is written all over the book.<sup>1</sup> Waife and his granddaughter and their touching adventures are obviously on loan from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, like the whole collection of itinerant actors and showmen. Old Faithorne, with his "grotesque face" and his delectable flute; the benevolent and simple-minded Hartopp, ex-mayor of Gatesboro', whose cherished belief in his insight into character is so easily overthrown; Mrs Crane, and Jasper Losely; are all recognizably of the tribe of Dickens. Losely is simply one of Dickens's awful criminals, like Bill Sikes; the very name gives him away—the Dickensian Jasper. But there are so many marks of Dickens that it is not worth while to particularize, except to point out that some are of the nature of scenery and stage properties, such as the grim house, "old, dingy, dilapidated," in which Losely encounters the other outlaw, Cutts.

At the door of this house stood another man, applying his latch-key to the lock. As Losely approached, the man turned quickly, half in fear, half in menace—a small, very thin, impish-looking man, with peculiarly restless features that seemed trying to run away with his face. Thin as he was, he looked all skin and no bones—a goblin of a man whom (*sic*) it would not astonish you to hear could creep through a keyhole. Seeming still more shadowy and impalpable by his slight, thin, sable dress, not of cloth, but of a sort of stuff like alpaca. Nor was that dress ragged, nor, as seen but in starlight, did it look worn or shabby; still you had but to glance at the creature to feel

<sup>1</sup> Dickens suggested the title.

that it was a child in the same Family of Night as the ragged felon that towered by its side.<sup>1</sup>

*Kenelm Chillingly* (1873), which followed *A Strange Story* "*Kenelm* and *The Coming Race*, is another realistic study with modern *Chillingly*" affiliations, though intended to illustrate the same philosophy and "*The Parisians*" of the Real and the Ideal. Memories of fifty years before are embodied in it; but the gospel of muscularity preached by Hughes and the Kingsleys, G. A. Lawrence, and other stalwarts, in the previous decade, is only one of the fresher ingredients in the composition of the hero. That hero follows the fashion and saves his soul by living in the slums and working as a labourer, for this was the era of the humanitarian and the Christian Socialist novel. Kenelm thus triumphs over the misfortune of being a baronet and born to wealth, and probably wickedness, and works out for himself a wholesome theory of life. A final allusion to Lytton's old Ealing romance occurs in the sad episode of Kenelm and Lily. *The Parisians* (1873) was written concurrently: Lytton had a habit of composing novels in pairs, *Eugene Aram* and *Godolphin*, *Lucretia* and *The Caxtons*, also having been pairs in hand simultaneously. It is a view of Parisian society of all ranks and colours just before the siege and fall of Paris: the old noblesse, the financial and industrial potentates, the working classes, the Bohemians and outcasts, and the socialists and communists with their specifics and their subterranean activities. Lytton's sympathies were with the Orléanists; but he would have preferred restoration of the Emperor to the unrest which he foresaw from either a constitutional government or a republic. His knowledge did not go very deep; but he showed ability in divining forces and tendencies, just as he had done in *The Coming Race*. Nor did his realism go deep in this group of novels, though he obviously did his best to vindicate the change of style. He had that essential of sound realism, a clear sense of the vital part money plays in the mechanism of life. This comes out conspicuously in *What will he do with It?*—where the problem of ways and means is the hinge on which nearly every

<sup>1</sup> *Bleak House* had appeared five years earlier, and *Little Dorrit* only the year before.



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contingency turns. Unfortunately, his acquiescence in the general liking for plots and all which they entail weakened the realism in these later novels, by forcing him to subordinate truth to other exigencies.

Somehow, Lytton has managed to appropriate more space here than was intended or is perhaps justified by his own importance. At any rate, he is a perfect example of great talent but small originative power responding so sensitively to the changes of opinion and of fashion that he adapts himself to them as fast as they appear on the horizon. His novels are in that way a mirror of literary history in the half-century from his *Pelham* (1827) to *The Parisians* (1873). The unfinished *Pausanias the Spartan* (1876), a belated aftermath of his historical romancing, was not given to the world till three years after his death.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PREDECESSORS OF DICKENS

To head a chapter "The Predecessors of Dickens" is not to sink into the fallacy of "Messianism" exposed by the lamented Abel Chevalley, when he remarked on the habit literary historians have of regarding everything as the preparation for something else, even when this may be something as yet undreamed of.<sup>1</sup> For Dickens, as everyone knows, was launched on his first novel by a publishing house that wanted him to furnish letterpress for illustrations which were already in hand and which followed a fashion already established. His job was to rival, and if possible to improve upon, a very popular brand of fiction; hence what sort of thing the popular fiction of that day was is a very pertinent question to the study of Dickens.

In the twenty years after the death of Jane Austen, whilst *Sporting* Scott was writing his last *Waverleys*, Galt and Miss Ferrier *novels* were publishing a few books for a restricted public, and the earlier Irish novelists entertaining their own people, there was *and novels of* a dearth of great names but no lack of new books at the circulating libraries. Apart from the sentimental trash always to be found there, this new fiction consisted, to put it summarily, of two sorts: variations and expansions, adapted to the time and manners, of the ancient and everlasting jest-book; and novels whose chief interest was that they gave an account of *fashionable life* fashionable society by people who were in it. Some had the advantage of combining both attractions, and it was this double lure that made Theodore Hook's the most popular on the market. Even an artless retailer of comic or sensational scenes and anecdotes of fast life about town, such as the Irishman Pierce Egan (1772-1849), was in request as an expert guide as well as an entertainer.

<sup>1</sup> *Vient de Paraître*, juillet 1925. "Il faut abandonner l'attitude messianique. L'histoire du roman n'est pas du tout une Marche à l'Étoile orientée vers Richardson et Fielding et, de là, sur les constellations du dernier siècle."

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*His Life in London; or the Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq., and his Elegant Friend, Corinthian Tom, accompanied by Bob Logic, the Oxonian, in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis* (1821-1828), and the sequel, *Finish to the Adventures of Tom, Jerry, and Logic in their Pursuits through Life in and out of London* (1828), though the lowest of low comedy, had a great run in serial form and then as books, like divers similar farragos devoted to the turf, the fancy, or the stage.<sup>1</sup> These rollicking chronicles of the young Corinthians, their exploits against law and order, hoaxing and flabbergasting and dry-nursing of their country cousins, and their boasted free-and-easy comradeship with the dregs of the populace, were the evergreen picaresque story, the chap-book of roistering and cony-catching, in a Regency dress. Possibly they had a stronger flavour of sheer buffoonery, for the age prided itself on its sense of humour, broad and unfastidious though the taste might be; but otherwise there was no essential difference. Much of this was the mere effervescence of youth. The novel of fashionable life, on the other hand, was a more sophisticated compound, appealing to curiosity and also to snobbishness with its attention to manners and style, and satisfying cravings for gossip and scandal and for sly detraction, in ways nearer to society journalism than to literature. In this post-war world of the eighteen-twenties, which was also a post-revolutionary world, for though the industrial revolution had not yet run its full course it had upset social landmarks and started the rapid changes in class distinctions and manners which have never ceased since that date, if they have from time to time varied their pace, this kind of stuff, call it journalism or call it literature, arises spontaneously, and not much of it is more than ephemeral. The albums and keepsakes were one response to the appetite for information and tittle-tattle about the great;

<sup>1</sup> Even at the time, the illustrations were as potent an attraction as the letterpress; as time went on, they became by far the greater attraction. Thackeray remarks in *Roundabout Papers*: "Somehow, if you press the question so closely, on perusal, *Tom and Jerry* is not so brilliant as I had supposed it to be. The pictures are just as fine as ever; and I shook hands with broad-backed Jerry Hawthorn and Corinthian Tom with delight, after many years' absence. But the style of the writing, I own, was not pleasing to me; I even thought it a little vulgar—well! well! other writers have been considered vulgar—and as a description of the sports and amusements of London in the ancient times, more curious than amusing" ("De Juventute").

what was known as "silver-fork fiction," often supplied by the same hands, was another.<sup>1</sup> Lord Normanby, Lady Blessington, and Lady Charlotte Bury were among the titled purveyors of this article<sup>2</sup>; some of L.E.L.'s and all of Mrs Catherine Gore's were of the same category, and better worth reading. Theodore Hook's, which require some close examination, are partly of the same stamp and partly on the border-line of other sorts of fiction; but his novels and tales were so much abler than the average, and, further, were so full of recognizable persons and allusions, that they easily took the precedence among novels of fashion. Lytton must have had them in mind when he wrote, in *England and the English*, on novels of fashionable life:

In proportion as the aristocracy had become social, and fashion allowed the members of the more mediocre classes a hope to outstep the boundaries of fortune, and be quasi-aristocrats themselves, people eagerly sought for representations of the manner which they aspired to imitate, and the circles to which it was not impossible to belong. But as with emulation discontent was also mixed, as many hoped to be called and few found themselves chosen, so a satire on the follies and vices of the great gave additional piquancy to the description of their lives. . . . Those novels were the most successful which hit off some one or the other of the popular cravings—the desire to dissect fashion, or the wish to convey utility.<sup>3</sup>

Lytton's utilitarianism at that time led him to place in a superior class "those which affected to combine both, as the novels of Mr Ward," which he said, a little disingenuously, "were the most successful of all." As already noted, he tried to emulate these in *Pelham*. But he also recognized the usefulness of satire, and even of a candid picture of "the falsehood, the hypocrisy, the arrogant and vulgar insolence of patrician life." "The Utilitarians railed against them"; but these

<sup>1</sup> Cazamian (282) cites "the three-volume novel, entitled 'The Lady Flabella,' which Alphonse the doubtful had procured from the library that very morning," for Mrs Witterterly, in *Nicholas Nickleby* (xxviii.), as a fair sample.

<sup>2</sup> Lady Caroline Lamb ought not to be ignored; her glowing pictures of fashionable society in *Glenarvon* (1816) were nectar and ambrosia to the snob.

<sup>3</sup> *England and the English* (1834), Book II. 103.

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novels "were effecting with unspeakable rapidity the very purposes the Utilitarians desired."

*Theodore  
Hook*

Theodore Edward Hook (1788-1841) is probably known by name now chiefly as a brilliant practical joker, or to those interested in literature as a second-rate novelist who helped to show the way to his betters.<sup>1</sup> He is actually of some importance historically as happening to be the visible link between the farce and grotesquerie of Smollett and his school and the realism, irradiated with a different sort of humour, of Dickens. His close rendering of the characters and manners of the middle classes, of life in both upper and lower circles, was, however, of more service to the widening of the scope of fiction than his devotion to farce and caricature was to its comic development. He was one of those who told the world about sections and aspects of society that had been neglected or entirely overlooked. Son of a composer of some repute, Theodore went from a private school to Harrow, and was there at the same time as Byron, who abetted him in some of his boyish escapades. Then he was sent to Oxford, but could not stand university discipline; and that was the end of his regular education. Whilst still a schoolboy, he wrote libretti for his father's operas and melodramas, and presently was in great request for his songs, which he both composed and sang. His first piece for the theatre appeared at Drury Lane when he was sixteen, and was quickly followed by farces and melodramas, there or at the Haymarket, some original, some adapted from the French.<sup>2</sup> All were successful at the time; not so, however, his first novel, *The Man of Sorrow* (by "Mark Allendale") (1808), published the year before he reached legal manhood. He

<sup>1</sup> The best study of Hook, a better one than he ever deserved perhaps, is Myron T. Brightfield's *Theodore Hook and his Novels* (1928). See also the *Life and Remains of Theodore Hook*, by R. H. Dalton Barham (1849).

<sup>2</sup> Byron deplored that such "a man of talent" "should confine his genius to such paltry productions," and gibes at his cheap stage tricks:

"Now to the Drama turn—Oh! motley sight!  
What precious scenes the wondering eyes invite:  
Puns, and a Prince within a barrel pent,  
And Dibdin's nonsense yield complete content."

These lines from *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (560-563) and the later one, "And Hook conceal his heroes in a cask," allude to the melodrama *Tekeli*, in which a prince escapes from a fortress in this ignoble way, the audience having the gratification of seeing him wriggle into the barrel on the stage.

afterwards professed himself "heartily ashamed" of this, but rewrote it later and inserted it in *Sayings and Doings* as the short story *Merton*. Hook was taken up by society, and his wit and liveliness and astonishing powers of improvisation secured him a welcome to the coteries presided over by the Prince Regent. He was already celebrated as a bold and resourceful practical joker, one of the professional jesters of that facetious day; the elaborate Berners Street hoax, which took place in 1809, is a classic in the annals of folly. He was a buffoon, but a genuine and ever-ready wit, genial and good-natured, "the kindest-hearted of libellers," as Maginn called him.<sup>1</sup>

In after days, when he had been driven reckless by the Government charges held over his head, extravagance and the lusts of the flesh demoralized Hook completely. The black-guardism of his organ *John Bull*, which he started in 1820 and edited till his death, was unpardonable, even if it did good work in breaking down blind prejudice in favour of the ill-used but foolish queen, and in countering the manœuvres of the Whig houses who upheld her for party reasons. He degenerated into a sot, and, what is more relevant, a snob, of the basest kind: Thackeray's definition of the genus fitted him like a glove. But if contemporary reports be credited, he affected the stately demeanour of a Major Pendennis rather than of a Wagg,<sup>2</sup> Thackeray's malicious caricature. Disraeli hit him off fairly in *Coningsby*:

Nature had intended Lucian Gay for a scholar and a wit; necessity had made him a scribbler and a buffoon. . . . He was good-looking, had great animal spirits, and a keen sense of enjoyment, and could not drudge. Moreover he had a fine voice, and sang his songs with considerable taste; accomplishments which made his fortune in society and completed his ruin. In due time he extricated himself from the bench and merged into journalism, by means of which he chanced to become acquainted with Mr Rigby. That worthy individual was not slow in detecting the treasure he had lighted on; a wit, a ready and happy writer, a joyous and tractable being, with the

<sup>1</sup> See *Fraser*, April 1834.

<sup>2</sup> In *Pendennis*. Thackeray had been more friendly in his reviews of Hook in *Fraser's Magazine*, when they were fellow-contributors.

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education, and still the feelings and manners, of a gentleman. Frequent were the Sunday dinners which found Gay a guest at Mr Rigby's villa; numerous the airy pasquinades which he left behind, and which made the fortune of his patron."<sup>1</sup>

Ill fortune and ill fame fell on Hook as the result of an effort to do him a good turn for his services in amusing the prince and his friends. "Something must be done for Hook." He was given the post of Accountant-General at Mauritius, with a liberal salary (1813). Five years later, he was suddenly ejected from office, arrested, and sent home, charged with defalcations which were probably due to indolence and carelessness, but seem not to have been clearly defined in the examination through which he was put. But he was declared liable for sums that he never could have paid; and now had to live by his wits and his social talents, both of which he exploited unscrupulously, with the threat of restitution or imprisonment always hanging over him. He was in the King's Bench whilst preparing the first series of *Sayings and Doings*, and at the same time editing *John Bull*. It was followed by two further series, each in three volumes; and they were very profitable to Hook, who could not grow rich, however, with the prospect of confiscation staring him in the face, if he had had the least inclination to live within his means. But he went on with novel after novel, turned out biographies and other hack work, and took over the editorship of the *New Monthly Magazine* for two years (1837-1838), whilst still pursuing strenuously the life of pleasure and keeping up his reputation as a star in the fastest society.

"*Sayings  
and  
Doings*"

Hook was notoriously quick in gauging the tastes of the largest public, and his were the right assets for gratifying them. He had a rough-and-ready humour, a fund of anecdote and facetiæ, and no more scruple in utilizing items of personal history or gossip, and the peculiarities of friends or enemies, than in refurbishing an old jest, his own or someone else's. But the most profitable asset was his intimate knowledge of several grades of society, including the most fashionable, the most admired by those who could not attain to it. He knew the art of flattering snobbery whilst mocking at the

<sup>1</sup> Disraeli had previously sketched him as Stanislaus Hoax, in *Vivian Grey*.

grosser symptoms. He was himself the perfection of snobbery, one who had reached the goal, who was received in spheres to which he had no better title than that of court jester; and he guffawed at the slips and pretences of the flunkeys and tuft-hunters who aped their superiors without having acquired the tricks. It gratified him intensely to detect the mistakes at some pretentious dinner, "some little blunder, which neither the master nor the mistress of the house can hope to rectify on any future occasion, not being conscious of anything wrong. . . . There is always a dreadful uncertainty about the wine . . . the fish is generally doubtful, the entrées cold, the *soufflés* flat and heavy . . . and one has to sit opposite two or three odd-looking persons (connexions of the family who must be asked) with coarse neck-cloths and great red hands, with gold rings upon their fingers; people who go to the horrid lengths of eating with their knives and calling for porter."<sup>1</sup> So much for the upstart, the parvenu, whom Hook is never tired of flaying.

The nine volumes of *Sayings and Doings* are full of this cheap satire, concerned as they are with the classes betwixt and between, those sections of society which had been dismissed as too dull and commonplace to yield romantic interest. By dwelling on that foible, never so much to the fore as when society is in a restless state, when the class system itself has been disturbed, he could always raise a laugh or a sneer. Fanny Burney had touched the fringes of this middle-class life, with its social pretensions; Hook now drew a set of full-lengths. He was a sound realist when he stuck to what was familiar and kept within humdrum limits; this was the merit and the original feature of his work. But he was apt to be carried away by the temptations of farce, and then, good-bye to truth and probability. He was a hasty writer, with no time for premeditation; his stories, like his *bons mots*, were not carefully thought out beforehand. What could be expected of a society man engaged on two or three stories at a time? He often fell back upon old plots to which the characters within his range were ill-adapted; hence a forcing

<sup>1</sup> *Sayings and Doings*—*Danvers*.



of the point, and a liveliness that was often out of place; or he was tempted by a romantic tale, and tried to substitute probable—that is, flat and sordid—motives for high-flown idealism, with the inevitable inconsistency, apparent especially in his women characters. But Hook had two gifts which did him excellent service, so long as he kept clear of these pitfalls: a knack of fluent, plausible narrative, and an unfailing command of realistic detail. The one came from the same early practice in writing farces to which most of his extravagances were due. As to the other, it must be put down to a quick perception and retentive memory and no imaginative impulsion to paint anything but what he had seen. His descriptions of the outward features of London life are faultlessly correct; he seems to know the town from top to bottom, and he was fairly at home in the most popular haunts in the provinces. Just after his death, Lockhart went so far as to compare him to Dickens, as the only other novelist of the male sex “who has drawn portraits of contemporary English society destined for permanent existence”; and continued: “He is to the upper and middle life of that region, what Dickens is alone to its low life—a true authentic expositor; but in manner he is entirely original, and can be likened to no one.”<sup>1</sup>

“*Gervase Skinner*” His mimic world is more thickly studded with oddities, buffoons, and egregious scamps than the world which he, or anyone else, actually knew. To a man like Hook, apart from and his proclivity to farce, such departures from the normal were “*Danvers*” the means of earmarking characters, of producing any sort of individuality. He was not a Smollett. He did not aim as a rule at caricature or burlesque. He wanted to be realistic and could not save himself from farce. Realism is necessary to farce, but farce vitiates realism. It limits character-drawing to the more obvious peculiarities, tagging each with some vice or ruling passion, or some conspicuous mannerism—and human nature escapes. Hook believed himself, and was believed to be by his readers, an accomplished

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, May 1843; quoted by M. Clive Hildyard (*Lockhart's Literary Criticism*, 75-76).

draughtsman. But his characters are either the heroes and heroines and other automata taken over with some borrowed plot; or figures drawn from living originals of whom he had caught and exaggerated an idiosyncrasy which stamped them. He can produce a skinflint miser, or an incurable spendthrift, a purse-proud vulgarian, a toad-eater, a fop, a bumpkin, a rascally lawyer, or some other type recognizable to friends and enemies; but not a real person, there being nothing in his characters but these staring obliquities. It is comparing small things with great, but it must be remarked that here again Theodore Hook was a predecessor of Dickens. He was crude and elementary; he saw clearly but not beyond his nose. Dickens saw with his imagination. That is the difference, but it is a world of difference.<sup>1</sup>

So Hook presents his miser, Gervase Skinner, in a tale which was to illustrate the old saw, "Penny wise and pound foolish," whose fixed idea is to gain "a character for extraordinary liberality . . . on the most reasonable terms," and be thought "careless of money even to extravagance, being in his heart the veriest miser extant." Gulled by a lady of the theatre whose husband is in the plot, he is robbed, arrested for horse-stealing, shut by mistake in a madhouse, ruined by a bank smash, and of course abandoned by his mistress. In *Danvers*, the story of an extravagant couple, from which a passage has been quoted on the folly of making a show beyond what one is used to, the gentleman who comes into a large fortune and recovers domestic bliss only when he is again reduced to a moderate income—"Too much of a good thing is good for nothing"—puts up for Parliament; and here is his opponent:

"Sir Oliver Freeman was, as I have said, a patriot—an emancipator of Roman Catholics, and a Slave-Trade Abolitionist. He had disinherited his eldest son for marrying a Papist, and separated from his wife on account of the over-bearing violence of his temper. He deprecated the return to Cash-payments, and, while the gold was scarce, refused to receive

<sup>1</sup> Brightfield (*op. cit.*, 320-324) calls attention to Dickens's use of the hall-mark, the trick of speech, etc.—e.g. in the Fat Boy, Jingle, Dick Swiveller, Mr Mantalini, etc.

anything but guineas in payment of his rents. He advocated the cause of the Christian Greeks, and subscribed to Hone; he wept at agricultural distress, and never lowered his rents. He cried for the repeal of the Six Acts, and prosecuted poachers with the utmost rigour of the law; he was a saint, and had carried an address to Brandenburg. He heard family prayers, twice every day, and had a daughter by the wife of a noble Earl, his neighbour; which daughter the said noble Earl recognized and acknowledged, though by no means doubtful of her origin."

It reads like a personal lampoon, going on to convict this monstrous humbug of agitating for the better treatment of prisoners, and introducing the treadmill; preaching against tithes, though himself a lay impropiator; and, finally, declaring "he would spend fifty thousand pounds to maintain the independence of his native county." Hook should have kept this sort of thing for the pages of *John Bull*. Not only is the line here very indistinct between fiction and journalism, such a tirade shows up the inferiority of his drawing, even as caricature, never getting beyond some odd twist of character, some mannerism, insincerity, or monomania, which is pushed to the limits of extravaganza. His boasted insight into human nature seems to be only a keen perceptiveness for what is least natural. The humours who walked the stage in the Elizabethan theatre, with whom Hook's rogues and eccentrics have been compared, were more lifelike, for the simple reason that they had a fund of internal vitality, and were not the mere hypertrophy of a vice.<sup>1</sup> And it follows that the affinity even with the more elementary creations of Dickens does not go deep, though Dickens also was given to the habit of animating a foible till it assumed the dimensions of a man. But the hyperbole of Dickens, the strength of his fantastic imagination, gave to such figures a life which, if not natural, was supernatural.

<sup>1</sup> Myron T. Brightfield (*op. cit.*, 264-265) argues that Hook with his hundreds of humours achieves a more lifelike picture of the human world, or at least, of a human world, than Smollett with his strongly marked but merely burlesque creations, such as Commodore Trunnion (in *Peregrine Pickle*, not *Roderick Random*). But lifelikeness in this order of creation depends upon the internal dramatic force of a character, the personal vitality with which he is endowed, at least as much as on the general vraisemblance of the crowd, the setting, etc.; and the ingenious argument must be regarded as unconscious special pleading for the biographer's temporary hero.

As already mentioned, Hook made a story for *Sayings and Doings* out of the precocious novel that failed. *The Man of Sorrow* was pruned and rewritten as *Merton*, a complicated little drama of a Gretna Green marriage and its train of mishaps, well justifying the original title.<sup>1</sup> He used to make notes of facts illustrating old saws, and now took these as the starting-point of stories midway between the French and the *proverbe*, the short dramatic piece exemplifying some well-worn maxim. He said himself that he imitated the "Proverb." Thus *The Friend of the Family* is based on the theme "All is not gold that glitters." "The mild, the pious, unassuming Ford, the friend of the family," confesses himself, when driven to the wall by his daughter's perfidy, to be "a flagrant sinner"; and "consummates a life of crime by suicide." He had so contrived to hoodwink a wealthy peer as to have him completely in his power, with of course a hold on his fortune. To *Merton*, Hook prefixed the adage, "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," and he wrung out of it much pathos of a banal order. *Martha the Gypsy*, the tale of a curse fulfilled, admonishes that "Seeing is believing"; *The Sutherlands*, "Marry in haste and repent at leisure"; *The Man of Many Friends*, "Practice is really better than precept"; *Passion and Principle*, "That which cannot be cured must be endured"; *Cousin William*, "Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte." *Gervase Skinner*, one of his best, also has its motto, as already noticed. It has a character, too, Kekewich, whose manner of speech might be a rough outline for Mr Jingle. But there were so many prototypes of Dickens's finished article in early novels<sup>2</sup> that it is a delusion to suppose Hook invented the type. It is the flimsiest show of moral admonition or even of worldly sagacity that appears hitched to these truisms. In some of his *Sayings and Doings*, all Hook sought was a medium for his jocularly and his stores of anecdote. In others, he made free with a romantic

<sup>1</sup> Dibelius (ii. 7) very unwisely compares *Merton* with *Caleb Williams*.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Captain Crowe's brother-in-law, in *Launcelot Greaves* (see Volume IV. 222). In other novels of Hook, Dibelius (ii. 261-262) instances Wells, Hull, and Nubley, in *Gilbert Gurney*, Skinner himself and Tapes in *Gervase Skinner*, Major Overall, in *Maxwell*, and Jack Brag, in the novel named after him.

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plot, and gave it a realistic dress. The stories range from the crass sentiment of the tale of passion and its consequences, *Cousin William*; to the farcical history of the lady-killer, in *Doubts and Fears*, who intrigues simultaneously with his separated wife and her daughter; or of *The Sutherlands*, the headstrong and the over-cautious brother, and their matrimonial schemes; and to the satirical *Gervase Skinner* or the picaresque *Martha the Gypsy*.

“Max-  
well”

*Maxwell* (1830) differs from these miniature novels chiefly in its length and extra complications; it is Hook not at his most scintillating—a plodding, straightforward rendering of dull middle-class life, with over-insistence on its meanness, and a frugal allowance of the high life which he rejoiced in contrasting with shabby pretences, or used for plot purposes as the happy state to which a deserving gentleman might be promoted by an opportune legacy, or an unfortunate restored by inheriting a peerage. Dr Maxwell, like other medical men, is in the habit of purchasing bodies of executed criminals for dissection. Whilst at work on the supposed corpse of Hanningham, hanged for a crime he did not commit, he detects signs of life; and, as he believes in the man's innocence, he brings him round and has him smuggled out of the country. The beautiful Maria whom his son Edward Maxwell has been pursuing, whilst alarmed at her suspicious intimacy with the police, is the daughter of Hanningham, who is afterwards acquitted, whereupon Maxwell's objections to the union disappear. Other incidents, and improbabilities supposed to be made less improbable by Hook's intrepid use of coincidence, amplify this artless story. Maxwell in his pride rejects his daughter Kate's suitor, Somerford, whose mother is believed to be illegitimate; but lets her marry Apperton, who turns out to be a bastard and a swindling company-promoter, and for a time ruins his father-in-law. Meanwhile, Somerford is found to be the heir to an earldom, and when Apperton fortunately dies Kate marries him. The lesson of the final surprise is, beware of greed and ambition: everything shows that there is a Providence. Of the more boisterous humour for which Hook was celebrated there is comparatively little, though the flash phraseology and facetious

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over-writing make amends. Another of Mr Jingle's many precursors appears, in Major Overall.<sup>1</sup> Much quaffing of gin and toddy, and copious draughts of Combe, Delafield, and Co., suit the vulgarity of tone, and the sordid, calculating maxims which are by no means reprehended.

Such is a novel by Theodore Hook. No better and perhaps "*The no worse is *The Parson's Daughter* (1833), though more than a *Parson's* match in vulgarity of tone. Two young men are introduced, Charles Harvey and George Sheringham: Charles is in love with the wife of the brutal, hard-drinking Squire Harbottle, whom she has married under duress; George with the admirable daughter of Parson Lovell, the high-minded rector. There is a dragon in the path in Lady Frances Sheringham, George's mother, champion of the beneficent law of primogeniture, and a vulgarian of the snobbish breed, who wants her son to marry the daughter of a duchess. George, however, engages himself to the adorable Emma, meanwhile, through the supposed drowning of a whole family in a shipwreck, inheriting the title of Lord Weybridge.<sup>2</sup> But Fanny Harbottle is forced to leave her detestable husband, who afterwards exonerates her by confessing on his deathbed that he was responsible for the untimely end of Charles Harvey, who rode at midnight into a gravel-pit. Emma, unfortunately though blamelessly, excites her lover's jealousy, and he becomes engaged to the duchess's daughter. Then a surviving son arrives on the scene, saved from the wreck. George is no longer a peer, and is liable for the thousands he has disbursed of the rightful heir's fortune.*"

<sup>1</sup> Dibelius (*op. cit.*, 312-313) rightly compares the Jinglisms of Mr Cophagus, in Marryat's *Japhet* (1836). The *Pickwick Papers* began coming out in April 1836. He is not so relevant in the evidence he laboriously adduces that Hook borrowed from most of the novelists of any note in the hundred years preceding him; that he adapted the exciting methods of Mrs Radcliffe to realistic fiction about middle-class people, and so on. Maxwell's secret laboratory, and Hanningham's restoration to life, are supposed to be striking examples of Gothic sensationalism. If Hook could have read the catalogue of authors from whom he learned his art, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Godwin, Miss Burney, Miss Edgeworth, Scott, etc., it would have sent him into roars of (modest) laughter at the evidence of his erudition.

<sup>2</sup> Hook coolly makes George poke fun at his readers' ability to swallow coincidences without a quail: "It won't do, Charles. I rejoice to see your spirits return; but drowning a whole family to give me a peerage, is rather too romantic—it is carrying the joke too far; it would not be tolerated even in one of Colburn and Bentley's namby-pamby novels." The cream of the joke is that Colburn and Bentley published the book.

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The upshot is his return to the parson's daughter, who forgives him; and, as she has been left Mr Harbottle's large fortune, they are very well off, the death later on of the other Lord Weybridge and George's final inheritance of the title being a small addition to their amenities. But who cares a straw? They are all vulgarians together: Lady Frances, the vulgar worldly woman; Mr Harbottle, the vulgar, purse-proud, ostentatious person, who despises feeling<sup>1</sup>; Dr MacGropus, the vulgar, good-natured, outspoken bosom friend; Hollis, the spying, treacherous butler; and Lady Gorgon, who before George became a lord had given the servants orders not to admit him, and then invites him to dinner without countermanding these:

"He asked me, my lady, if your ladyship was at home," said the man; "indeed he was a-coming right in, without asking one thing or another, so I said you was out; and he asked me if I was sure, for he was come here to dinner; and I said I was sure your ladyship was not at home; and then he made a sort of sniff with his nose, because he could smell the dinner quite plain in the hall; however, I persisted, and so at last of all he said, says he, my lady, 'That's uncommon odd,' and off out he went like a shot."

"Why, what on earth could induce you to do such a thing, Stephen?" screamed her ladyship.

"Why, my lady, your orders to me when we were in town last year were—says your ladyship to me, says you, 'If ever that Captain Sheringham calls when I am at home, say I am out; and if he calls when I am out, and any of the young ladies are at home, say *they* are out; and if ever he calls about dinner-time, as he sometimes does, never let him in'; so I did as I was bid."

*"Gilbert Gurney"* Gilbert Gurney (1836), the autobiography of a would-be dramatist, is more in Hook's line than this second-hand plot-work. The book is full of "Nature's humorists," drolls and oddities badged with eccentricities of physique or attire. Technically, these are the minor characters, those associated with the plot business being flat and colourless. Then there are deferential portraits of the uppermost classes. The snob

<sup>1</sup> It is a specially blatant portrait, this: "*Partie!*—oh, that's French," said the Squire; "I hate French, and I hate every thing but having my own way."

can be observed doing his best to be at home with middle-class folk, but finding nothing to interest except their awkward assumption of "fashionable pose." The fortune of the book is Gilbert's friend Daly. He is the debtor who passes himself off as his twin-brother, and obtains full quittance for all demands from a dangerous creditor at five shillings in the pound. He is put into a double-bedded room at an inn with a lady, and astonished at her not snoring discovers that she is a corpse. This is an echo of the *Sentimental Journey*, turned into gruesome farce. There are puns and other pleasantries galore. Sheridan, who has lost a play submitted by the author, invites him to take any three he pleases from a drawerful of waiting manuscripts. An Irish priest grants absolution to the ostler who had never greased the horses' teeth to prevent their eating the beans, and next year finds that the rogue has done it—at the priestly suggestion. "I'd never have had sich a thought in my head if your reverence hadn't been kind enough to put it there." Zigzag justice at the Old Bailey is sarcastically described:

"Don't you understand, sir?" said the sheriff—"why the next person will be found guilty—the last was acquitted—the one after the next will be acquitted too—it comes alternate like—save half—convict half—that's what we call a zigzag; and taking the haggregate, it comes to the same pint, and I think justice is done as fair here as in any court in Christendom."

Daly betrays Gilbert Gurney by carrying off the girl he loves; but—such are the inscrutable ways of Providence—she turns out a shrew and loses her money, so that justice being obviously done Gilbert forgives him.

In his last stories, conceited dandies and mere pretenders to "*Jack* fashion give themselves airs and are taken in or turned inside *Brag*," out, in a manner that would have been approved by the *etc.* pamphleteering novelists who exposed the impecunious gallants of Tudor London. Such farcical doings take the place of plot. *Jack Brag* (1837) reminded Hook of Falstaff; Jack goes courting two ladies at once. He is duped, cheated, discomfited in his attempt upon an heiress, and retires at last from the world of fashion to the paternal tallow-chandlery



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from whence he came. In *Peregrine Bunce, or Settled at Last* (1842), the final four chapters of which are by another hand, the misadventures of a person with a comic failing, shyness, are turned to pitiless farce. *The Ramsbottom Letters* (1872) and *The Ramsbottom Papers* (1874), which did not appear as books till long after his death, are middling journalism, Mrs Ramsbottom's letters from Paris being second-hand *Humphry Clinker*, with heavy drafts on Mrs Malaprop.

Hook as  
a pre-  
decessor  
of  
Dickens

Jeering and sneering are Hook's readiest means of satire. His humour tells rather by quantity than quality. It was always at forced pressure; he knew too well what was expected of the funny man, and it cannot be mistaken for true comedy. Obviously, Hook did not love his fellow-beings. He fell as far short in simple humanity as Dickens perhaps exceeded when he let his tender heart riot in sentiment. Yet it was out of this coarse and often tasteless realism that the artistry of Dickens was to emerge; and the fact must not be disparaged that Hook established a fashion of literal, unromantic portraiture of mediocre people and their mediocre lives, and made it the vogue. Much more obscure sections of the population were presently to benefit, and have their likenesses drawn. As to art, he had the expertness, not only of a comic playwright, but also of a stage-manager and of a property-man. He groups his people as if he were placing them in position on the stage.

The blundering confusion by which the little denunciation of jilting, which Miss Engleheart was about to pronounce, was checked, created too much bustle to escape the major; but even that might have blown over, had not Mrs Palmer, as Miss Engleheart, tired of attempting to be didactic, was leading Miss Palmer to her seat, on a creaking music-stool, before an upright Broadwood, gone up to the major's lady, and taking her by both hands, whispered, "You mustn't be offended, my dear Mrs O., Miss E. knew nothing at all about *your* affair when she made her observations—only I thought it best to stop her in time, you know." <sup>1</sup>

In Miss Palmer's preparations to entertain the well-to-do Mrs Overall the very table is set before the eye:

<sup>1</sup> All these extracts—and many more might have been quoted just as appropriately—are from chap. viii. of *Maxwell*.

Mrs Overall was known to be a lady of fortune, used to everything "nice and comfortable": she kept her own carriage, her men-servants, and all that; and, therefore, they must be very particular, and have everything uncommonly nice for *her*—and so Miss Palmer, the night before, had a white basin of hot water up into the parlour to bleach almonds, with which to stick a "tipsy-cake," after the fashion of a hedgehog, and Mrs Palmer sent to the pastry-cook's for some raspberry jam, to make creams in little jelly-glasses, looking like inverted extinguishers; and spent half the morning in whipping up froth with a cane whisk to put on their tops like shaving lather. And Miss Palmer cut bits of paper, and curled them with the scissors to put round the "wax-ends" in the wax lustres on the chimney-piece, and the three-cornered lamp in the drawing-room was taken out of its brown-holland bag, and the maid set to clean it on a pair of rickety steps; and the cases were taken off the bell-pulls, and the picture-frames were dusted, and the covers taken off the card-tables, all in honour of the approaching fête.<sup>1</sup>

After agonies due to the smoking of the drawing-room chimney, the smells pervading the whole house, and the slight inebriation of the cook, the hour arrives, and they hear Major and Mrs Overall drive up. But the green-grocer who was to wait at table has gone for the porter, and the front door is opened by the housemaid.

The afternoon being windy, the tallow candle which she held was instantaneously blown out; at the same instant the back-kitchen door was blown to with a mighty noise, occasioning, by the concussion, the fall of a pile of plates, put on the dresser ready to be carried up into the parlour, and the overthrow of a modicum of oysters in a blue basin, which were subsequently, but with difficulty, gathered up individually from the floor by the hands of the cook, and converted in due season into sauce, for the before-mentioned cod's head and shoulders. At this momentous crisis, the green-grocer (acting waiter) returned with two pots of Meux & Co.'s Entire, upon the tops of which stood heads not a little resembling the whipped stuff upon the raspberry creams,—open goes the door again, puff goes the wind, and off go the "heads" of the

<sup>1</sup> See note on p. 218.

porter-pots into the faces of the refined Major Overall and his adorable bride, who was disrobing at the foot of the stairs.<sup>1</sup>

The Moss brothers ensconced in the royal mail, "with lighted cigars in their mouths, and, as their calumniators say, a well-sized bottle of mahogany-coloured brandy and water in the coach pocket"; and Maxwell and Apperton left behind by the parlour fire, the surgeon "occasionally rising from his seat and standing with his back to the fire-place, rattling all the silver in his breeches pocket whenever the great gains likely to accrue from the innumerable speculations of his enterprising son-in-law were alluded to," are envisaged in the same sharp detail.<sup>1</sup> Then somebody, who is a nobody so far as the story is concerned, happens to come in: it is—

Mr Crackenthorpe,—a tall, bony, hatchet-faced young lawyer, either called, or about to be called forthwith to the bar, with a high aquiline nose, bristly light hair, swimming blue eyes, and huge white teeth,—a skeleton as to flesh, and in height a living slice of a sucking giant.

The smaller the part, the more pains will Hook expend on the individual's physical singularities—it is one of his own singularities. His technical methods are obviously of the roughest and readiest. Others had employed the device of accumulated details, with a clearer understanding of the problem, and a nicer appreciation of the relative weight. He left nothing out that emphasized or reiterated an effect. Probably this was not the sole reason for the many pages given to accounts of eating and drinking.<sup>2</sup> Open a volume anywhere, and the odds are that a heavy meal is going on, or someone is indulging in a little "ginnums" before dinner, or advising someone else to keep "a good stock of brandy and gin" in the house, or "winding up the night with some roasted oysters and a jorum of punch." There is a completeness or over-completeness of delineation in Hook's novels, a reproduction of anything and everything, which must be

<sup>1</sup> See note on p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> Dibelius is astounded: "Die Engländer sind einmal a *dining people*" (*op. cit.*, 260). This is a reference to the same chapter in *Maxwell*, where Hook quotes this remark from Voltaire. "Eating is the soul and spirit of English society," says Hook.

put among his shortcomings, along with a coarseness of tone and workmanship bordering on the illiterate. He was true to fact without conveying the overwhelming sense of fact that others have done with less effort. In no writer is it more evident that mere exactness and completeness are not the most essential elements of realism in fiction. Dickens likewise used masses of detail to get his effects, and had a similar way of picturing a scene or a setting. He might even have taken hints from his predecessor. But the colour, the shades and contrasts, and above all the humour, in his paintings of figures and surroundings, are of a totally different order.<sup>1</sup>

The novel of fashionable life, when Theodore Hook laid *Mrs* down his pen, was chiefly in the hands of Mrs Catherine Gore *Gore* (1799-1861), a most prolific lady, who had several plays produced at the Haymarket and Drury Lane, and maintained an output of one or two novels a year down almost to her death, besides contributions to the annuals and other miscellaneous work. She was a woman of twenty-five when she published her first novel, *Theresa Marchmont, or the Maid of Honour* (1824), which was followed by another, *The Bond*, the same year. *A Romance of Real Life* (1829) and *Women as they Are, or the Manners of the Day* (1830), define her attitude. A woman who has enjoyed the life of fashion, at home and in Paris and at German spas, sketches its manners and morals, with an amused and no malignant eye, and a caustic wit, but only an ironic pretence at doing the susceptible reader any good. She exclaims, in *Women as they Are*: "A truce to sentimentality, which is only a subject not an object." Here it will be treated "with detachment and sang-froid." This is a tale in which the authoress conforms to "the custom for idle novelists to shape their ends"; and she disentangles the several threads so as to reveal the new pattern, in "the subsequent marriages, disappointments, and fatal nemesis of ill-doing." *Mothers and Daughters, a Tale of the Year 1830* (1831), shows some approach to the quiet and restrained manner of Jane Austen, in the study of a rabid society woman

<sup>1</sup> Brightfield (*op. cit.*, 325-328). Brightfield also notices that Dickens probably borrowed coincidences of plot and the like from Hook.

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ruthlessly sacrificing her daughter on the altar of fashion. It was followed by *The Fair of Mayfair* (1832), half-a-dozen stories. The preface announces her repudiation of personality and scandal, for satire—"so long neglected." But she has to admit that the second story, "The Separate Maintenance," is a choice example of fifty scandals that could be named. "The Flirt of Ten Seasons" describes how the matchmaking policy of Lady Germaine leaves her daughter Adela a hardened coquette, and as far from the goal after ten seasons as at the beginning. "Hearts and Diamonds, or Fifty Years ago," is the lamentable history of a female gamester; and "My Grand-Daughter" is frankly didactic, a complete object-lesson in virtue. In "A Divorcée," she treats the case compassionately, her usual gaiety and persiflage being laid aside. But "The Special Licence" reverts to causticity, in the confounding of an arrogant, extravagant young puppy and his worthy sister, to show the folly of pretending to qualities and merits which one has not got.

"Mrs  
Army-  
tage"

Thackeray treated Mrs Gore to one of his most hilarious and quizzical burlesques, in *Novels by Eminent Hands*. But if the gaudy ostentatiousness and vacuity of the people she depicted deserved "Lords and Liveries,"<sup>1</sup> the truth and clear-headedness of the writer did not. Lytton, who came into friendly competition with her in *Pelham*, *The Disowned*, and *Godolphin*, observed very fairly, in *England and the English*<sup>2</sup>: "We are a matchmaking nation; the lively novels of Mrs Gore have given a just and unexaggerated picture of the intrigues, the manœuvres, the plotting and counterplotting that make the staple of matronly ambition." In spite of careless workmanship, she came still nearer than in *Mothers and Daughters* to the comedy of Jane Austen in *Mrs Armytage, or Female Domination* (1836), the chief blot upon which is its wilful didacticism, a fault which she usually avoided. Mrs Armytage is terribly alive; and the son and the son's wife with her vulgar relatives, over all of whom she would fain domineer, are excellently contrasted: the other figures are

<sup>1</sup> "By the Authoress of 'Dukes and Déjeuners,' 'Hearts and Diamonds,' 'Marchionesses and Milliners,' etc."

<sup>2</sup> Book II., chap. i.

vague. This book stands out curiously from the rest of Mrs Gore's work.

The charge often brought against her that she flattered her "Cecil, a fashionable readers, and so secured their suffrages, is unjust; they read her for her vivacity, a brilliance often overdone, and for her bantering humour; no doubt they were aware of the satire between the lines, and if it did not irk them much it did them no harm. She was, at all events, well able to defend herself against detraction and misunderstanding. In presenting *Cecil, or the Adventures of a Coxcomb* (1841), which was to be immediately followed by *Cecil, a Peer*, she wrote: "Critics resemble Eastern mutes, who exist by bowstringing their fellow-creatures, and venting their envious spite on the beauties committed to their hands. Nothing generous, nothing manly in their nature." The public is more indulgent. She prided herself on being "a good flippant writer," who "knows nothing very profoundly," but does know "something of a great many matters," and can catch the tone of society. "In a word, your first-rate flippant writer must be a very pleasant, clever, well-bred, lively, smart, slippery, facetious, and last, not least, unblushing sort of person." This amused, and amusing, detachment of hers must not be regarded as cynical: she would not have troubled to go so far into the minds and feelings of her worldings had she been nothing more than "a good flippant writer." Cecil, one of the spoilt children of aristocratic society, describes his own infancy and upbringing, his days at the university, and entrance upon the London scene. He is soon an expert at "the jargon of London life," and the ways and haunts of the roués; he assimilates the views of "the genuine Bond-Street loungeur," yet is not uncritical of those individuals dressed "in the bang-up style, which the Barouche Club had brought into fashion—their dialect being the newly discovered European tongue, called slang." They are the mohocks of the previous century, not improved by the change of date. With an undazzled eye, Cecil contemplates, from within and without, many residences of high degree in town and suburb; "the villas and snuggeries ranged along the river from Vauxhall

Bridge to that of Richmond, in white and sparkling rows, like the mineral teeth of Desirabode." There is almost as much gastronomy as in Hook's novels, but the raillery is more ladylike. Cecil enters Parliament; and he goes abroad, to Lisbon and Cintra at the time of the Peninsular War, then to Germany, and on to Genoa and Venice, where he becomes the intimate friend of Byron. Plot there is none; all goes on with the capricious irregularity of life; love affairs are broken off by death or misadventure, incidents and conversations remain half-finished. It is the confusion of life at high pressure, in which nothing has time to reach a logical terminus. All are contending together, all are at the mercy of hazard. In the person of Cecil, Mrs Gore plumes herself on the universality of her knowledge of Mayfair: he is "three gentlemen in one," a great dining-out man; erstwhile "a wit among lords," now at the end, "a lord among wits." She might also have plumed herself on a technique that gave a vivid impression of such an existence as it ran its hurrying, glittering course. Such an existence is miniaturized in *Cis Danby*—"at fifteen a *petit courrier des dames*, and at twenty a *roué*," who becomes at forty "a very foolish fond old man, more foolish and more fond than Lear at double the age." The novel breaks off with the appointment of Cecil to a place at Court in 1825; and the sequel takes up the story in 1830, just after the Catholic Relief Act, presenting London under William IV, with the hubbub over the reform agitation, and Paris under Charles X and Louis Philippe, the affair of the Duchesse de Berri, and scenes at the Tuileries and the Louvre. A passage which belies Mrs Gore's reputation for mere flippancy is the death of Lady Ormington, reviewing in delirium her guilty past—in the presence of her husband, and of Cecil, her son but not his. She has bestowed on the Ormington family an unlawful heir, who becomes Lord Ormington. The light aphorisms for which she was applauded also belie it. "Absence is said to extinguish slight predilections and stimulate great passions, as the wind which fans a fire puts out a candle." The world is made up of absurdities: Cecil sometimes feels "that his life was made up of trifling

with other people's happiness." He is "a haunted man"—"my brain has galleries, my heart chambers, as full of spectres as those of the Castle of Otranto!"<sup>1</sup>

Mrs Frances Trollope (1780-1863), mother of the greater *Frances* Anthony Trollope, was an older woman and a not much less *Trollope* prolific writer than Mrs Gore<sup>2</sup>; she was fully as energetic when she did begin, but that was not till 1831, when she came back from the United States, annoyed by a business disappointment and exasperated by the crudities of life in the young republic, and published *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, which raised a storm as violent as Dickens excited later with his *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*. She had amused herself "by making notes," hoping "some day to manufacture them into a volume"; and the sting was in the literal, if superficial, truth, as much as in the alleged unfairness and venom of the book.<sup>3</sup> It is not a novel, at any rate in form, which is the straightforward one of a visitor's journal, expanding eventually into an anatomy of the whole social system. But the sketching of manners and of harsh and ill-conditioned characters shows the eye and dexterity of the novelist; and there is no reason to question that Mrs Trollope transcribed her notes honestly, even if she realized, long before she left Cincinnati, that she owed it to the world to indite this warning against any "wild scheme of placing all the powers of the State in the hands of the populace."<sup>4</sup>

Her *Vicar of Wrexhill* (1837), which she thought first of "The entitling 'The Unco' Guid,'" is a fierce cartoon of clerical *Vicar of* depravity and humbug, which seems to be animated with the *Wrex-* same sense of personal resentment. It roused protest from the *hill* Evangelicals, and was declared by one Low Church parson to

<sup>1</sup> There is something very French in Mrs Gore's method and manner. She herself quoted, with evident satisfaction, from a French review of *Cecil*: "Une bizarrerie nouvelle, même comme une bizarrerie; le plus singulier pêle-mêle de bon sens et de paradoxes, de probité et d'esprit d'enthousiasme et d'ironie, qui fut jamais" (Preface to *Cecil, a Peer*. The notice was in the *Débats*).

<sup>2</sup> "The published works of Frances Trollope amount to one hundred and fifteen volumes" (*Memoir*, by F. E. Trollope, ii. 286).

<sup>3</sup> The fury of the Americans and the proportional success of the book are commemorated in Mr Weller's advice to Mr Pickwick, to go to America and write a book "about the 'Merrikins as'll pay all his expenses and more, if he blows 'em up enough" (Pickwick, xlv.).

<sup>4</sup> Preface.



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"*The  
Widow  
Barn-  
aby*"

be deliberately drawn from himself.<sup>1</sup> The vicar is a worse hypocrite than Stiggins or Chadband: Mrs Trollope had in her a spice of Dickens, though her humour falls immeasurably short. That is visible again in *The Widow Barnaby* (1839), its sequel, *The Widow Married* (1840), and the postscript, *The Barnabys in America* (1843), in which Mrs Trollope retaliated on the Americans who had raged at her *Domestic Manners*. This vulgar creature emigrates to New Orleans, when London has grown too hot for her gambling husband; and, like her creator, writes a book on the Americans; but, unlike her creator, she takes them at their face value, and they accept her glorification with enthusiasm. *Tremordyn Cliff* (1835) and *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* (1836) are two more of her successes. But the vulgarities she branded so vivaciously are those of a remote day, and her impersonations of it, if worth recording, are not in any fuller sense historic.

Samuel  
Warren

It was said above that Theodore Hook and others like him thought themselves, or at least struck the attitude of, persons showing their readers how other people lived. Some of his specimens of the despised middle classes have this air of curious exhibits; and presently something of the same sort will be noticed in Samuel Warren's anomalous types, and the sporting maniacs drawn by Surtees, which seem to cry out for the last touch to be given to their grotesque physiognomies by John Leech or Richard Doyle. It is not without significance that Dickens retained the character of a showman, or saw no reason why he should relinquish the character of a reporter of what he had seen, in *Sketches by Boz*—"Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People." From this point of view, the apposite comparison for Mrs Trollope's *Domestic Manners* would be Harriet Martineau's *Society in America*, published six years later. Warren, in *Passages from the Diary of a late Physician, with notes and illustrations by the Editor* (1832-1838), in spite of the lurid colouring suited to the tradition of *Blackwood*, pretends to the responsibility incumbent on the professional investigator of a set of strange cases. He had studied medicine for six years before reading for the Bar, and he evidently thought

<sup>1</sup> *Memoir*, i. 258.

that the cases of which he had kept memoranda were of positive value, as instances of "the real practical working of virtues and vices," "What is nearest us touches us most. The passions rise higher at domestic than imperial tragedies." That is, the pathological importance of what he had to relate was balanced by the lesson for every man, to whom these cases were "a bright fountain of advice and warning." The claim, thus vaguely formulated, to something like scientific validity points towards the experimental novel, to be inaugurated by Zola half-a-century later. But if Warren more than half believed in it, he was deluding himself. He may, as he declares, have been an eye-witness of the facts; but what he asserts to be a literal report is patently as heavily weighted an appeal to the appetite for sensation and amazement as Monk Lewis himself could have fabricated. The statement of alleged fact is expanded into a story, and fitted with a moral, so as to approximate to conventional fiction. Dreadful maladies brought on by dissipation or neglect, fatal duels and suicides, hallucinations, delusions, insanity, and all the harrowing features of cancer, consumption, and the like, are described with full medical particulars. Warren had a ghoulish delight in lifting the veil from the most abandoned and degraded life. Gruesome anecdotes of body-snatching are the only source of comic relief.

In *Ten Thousand a Year* (1841) he emptied his notebooks of "*Ten* all that he knew or had taken on trust of villainy and imposture, *Thousand* and out of it constructed a sort of novel. Again a practical *a Year*" object is put forward, to convey "important moral lessons," and more especially to hold up to obloquy the anomalies, pedantries, and absurdities of the legal system, all the obstacles opposed to the expeditious discovery of the truth, and the manifold openings afforded to knavish lawyers and other black sheep. The rich and virtuous Aubreys are dispossessed of their property, and a mean little draper's assistant, Mr Tittlebat Titmouse, finds himself master of ten thousand a year, member of Parliament, and next heir to a peerage, through the chance discovery by a pair of shady solicitors that he represents an elder but forgotten branch of the family. Titmouse shows the

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Aubreys no mercy. He is as snobbish and as brutally selfish as he had previously been crawling and servile. He makes himself ridiculous in a hundred ways, without, however, amusing any sensible reader—his antics are too imbecile. The only satisfaction is that he proves in the end to be illegitimate; he has to make way again for the Aubreys, and goes to an asylum. All this is related with exhaustive detail of the legal complications involved; and nothing is spared of the evidence, the counsel's opinions, and the proceedings in court. Every move of the legal rogues is carefully explained, with notes at the end on the abuses impeached. Perhaps, when people suffered from such grievances, even the notes were read with eagerness. In truth, the controversial far outweighs the human interest; for the so-called characters are only illustrations of a thesis, and attract no sympathy, though the uglier ones do excite repulsion. Warren, of course, took sides himself, with the result that he is too hard on Oily Gammon, the most active and able of the fraudulent solicitors, who at least should have had the credit of being the biggest scoundrel. He shows presence of mind, courage, and even humour, though absolutely unscrupulous. When, on the other hand, Titmouse is held up to ridicule, the farce becomes puerile. It is mocking at a cripple, laughing at the abject and revolting. Warren, like others at that time, mistook abuse for satire, which must at least have something human to smile at. To him, mankind consists chiefly of scamps or brutes. It is pathology again, like the *Diary*. As for his realism, it is simply so much material flung down unsifted. Strange that in spite of grotesque distortions and wanton grimaces, which blunt the invective, there are passages showing a grim, tragic power. The worst might be expected from the bearers of such names as Mr Tag Rag, Mr Yahoo, the Rev. Smirk Mudflint, the Rev. Barnabas Bloodsuck, Mr Weasel, Mr Quirk, Swindle O'Gibbet, M.P., Grab, Vice, and Phelim O'Doodle. Yet the machinations and the squalid melodrama, and even some of the human deformities, are like a crude draft for parts of *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Bleak House*, before the genius of Dickens had got properly to work.

The link with Dickens is unmistakable in the case of the

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sporting novelist Robert Smith Surtees (1803-1864), though *R. S.* the nature of the link was mistaken even in their own time, *Surtees* and Lockhart had to point out that, if anybody was guilty of "filching," it was not the author of *Jorrocks's Jaunts and Jollities*. This, with its comic full report of a case before the magistrates, though it did not appear as a book until 1838, had come out in the *New Sporting Magazine* as a very irregular serial in the years 1831-1834, the *Pickwick Papers* not seeing the light till 1837.<sup>1</sup> To what extent Pierce Egan and the sporting journalist, "Nimrod," as C. J. Apperley was called and is still famous in the annals of hunting, were the begetters or the sponsors of these random chronicles need not be closely defined. Surtees did not like Egan, and set his face against cock-fighting, bull-baiting, and much else that had given the Cockney journalist his vogue. But Egan had set a fashion of pictorial miscellany which still appealed, and which was a little later to secure for Dickens the invitation from a publishing firm which brought forth Mr Pickwick and his adventures. As to "Nimrod," the exploits of Jorrocks, the Cockney sportsman, began in rivalry with him, and the rivalry went so far as to produce the Pomponius Ego of *Handley Cross*, which "Nimrod" recognized as only too faithful a likeness of himself, without being able to understand the sharp opposition between his temperament and his glorification of the sport for gentlemen and the iconoclastic attitude of Surtees.

Surtees, a kinsman of the famous antiquary, was a descendant *The* of country squires and himself in later life high sheriff of *creator of* County Durham, who as a briefless barrister in London went *Jorrocks* hunting in Kent and Surrey; and as a fox-hunter was all for the sport and nothing but the sport. He hated the more brutal pastimes then still tolerated by all classes, had no good word for such modern innovations as racing and betting, and held views which he expressed with the downrightness of a Cobbett on agriculture and the rural regime, on manners and fashions, and on the amusements of the day, from fox-hunting to the opera. He knew London and he knew the provinces. He had an exceedingly sharp eye for all the petty details of the

<sup>1</sup> Review of *Handley Cross*, in *Quarterly Review*, March 1843 (Hildyard, 130-131).

shifting spectacle. His novels, though they have one paramount topic, give an account, none fuller or more graphic, of life on the roads, at inns, and posting-houses, as well as in the hunting-field, during the era that saw the introduction of railways and vast economic and social changes. Thus, apart from their interest to the sportsman, they constitute a great page of social history, and contain a world of shrewd comment and broad satire on John Bull's foibles and eccentricities. Surtees had no imagination; and to turn from him to Dickens, with whom he was to run a sort of race with high hedges between for three decades, is to marvel at the contrast of his matter-of-fact picture, and even to wonder whether it is literature at all. But, with all his drawbacks, Surtees is a novelist of manners, with the emphasis on the second substantive; it might almost be said that his characters are composed of nothing but manners and mannerisms, and that both the manners and the stubborn individualities that he extolled have long been obsolete.

*The* Those who overlooked the dates had some excuse for their  
*"Jaunts* blunder over the court scene in *Jorrocks's Jaunts and Jollities*.  
*and* Serjeant Bumptious and Serjeant Buzfuz are said to be both  
*Jollities* drawn from the same Serjeant Bompas<sup>1</sup>; and Dickens certainly made his counsel hold forth in the same browbeating strain. Serjeant Bumptious shouts, with a bang on the table:

"My learned friend has, indeed, laboured to make the worse appear the better cause—to convert into a trifle one of the most outrageous acts that ever disgraced a human being or a civilized country. Well did he describe the importance of this case!—important as regards his client's character—important as regards this great and populous country—important as regards those social ties by which society is held together—important as regards a legislative enactment, and important as regards the well-being and prosperity of the whole nation—(bang, bang, bang). I admire the bombastic eloquence with which my learned friend introduced his most distinguished client—his most delicate-minded, sensitive client! Truly, to

<sup>1</sup> R. S. Surtees, by Frederick Watson, 30-31.

hear him speaking I should have thought he had been describing a lovely, blushing young lady; but when he comes to exhibit his paragon of perfection, and points out that great, red-faced, coarse, vulgar-looking, lubberly lump of humanity"—(here Bumptious looked at Jorrocks as though he would eat him)—"sitting below the witness-box, and seeks to enlist the sympathies of your worships on the Bench—of you, gentlemen, the high-minded, shrewd, penetrating judges of this important cause"—(and Bumptious smiled and bowed all along the Bench upon all whose eyes he could catch)—"on behalf of such a monster of iniquity, it does make one blush for the degradation of the British Bar"—(bang, bang, bang—Jorrocks here looked unutterable things).<sup>1</sup>

This is mild compared with Buzfuz; but the point is, Dickens must have read it before he composed his counsel's imperishable address. This first work was a collection of magazine sketches, not a book; but it launched Jorrocks, who now went on from strength to strength, in volumes whose contents were unprecedented in fiction, yet included characters, adventures, humour and satire, and other not-distant resemblances to the novel. *Handley Cross, or the Spa Hunt* (1843), and *Hillingdon Hill, or the Cockney Squire* (1845), are full-length novels, far too lengthy indeed, for Surtees never knew when to stop, a notable instance of which failing is his wearisome trial of Jorrocks by a commission in lunacy, in *Handley Cross*. His realism was in one sense unmitigated—nothing escaped him. In another sense, it was not realism at all,<sup>2</sup> for his object was caricature, to reduce what he considered absurdities to farce, in a manner that to some recalls Hogarth, but is nearer akin to Leech, who began illustrating his novels in 1853 and may reasonably be regarded as thereafter his collaborator.<sup>3</sup> The summary of their aberrations from the human norm with which his characters are always labelled at their debut, as in a comic frontispiece, is the old device of Smollett, which Hook misused, thus throwing his picture out of truth. Surtees, though a satirist,

<sup>1</sup> The speeches are given at length in Watson (*op. cit.*, 30–32).

<sup>2</sup> "With few exceptions, he avoided realism and satisfied himself with satire. His London silhouettes are the exception" (Watson, *op. cit.*, 35).

<sup>3</sup> Leech first illustrated Surtees in *Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour* (1853).

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was nearer the truth than Hook ever got, and his caricatures have far more life in them than Hook's exaggerated figures. For the salient quality of his satire is its fierce veracity. Surtees wore his cantankerousness, his annoyance at shams, his indignation at absurdities, on his sleeve; and a transparent honesty shines through the boisterous and aggressive laughter. Jorrocks makes the world laugh, but is not a butt; he is the mouthpiece, with his Sancho, James Pigg, of his creator's scorn.

"Mr  
Sponge"  
and  
others

*Hawbuck Grange, or the Sporting Adventures of Thomas Scott, Esq.* (1847), which contains an exhilarating account of a hare-hunt, was followed by *Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour* (1853). Mr Sponge is a horse-dealer, and Surtees knew something about horses, his very first book, and the only one to which he ever put his name, having been *The Horseman's Manual* (1831). He also knew a good deal about the operations of dealers and horse-copers, not excepting such a magnate as Sir Moses Mainchance, Bart., who swindles the confiding Billy Pringle, in *Ask Mamma*; hence this is not lacking in candour or satire. It was followed by *Ask Mamma, or the Richest Commoner in England* (1858), and that by *Plain or Ringlets?* (1858) and *Mr Facey Romford's Hounds* (1865). *Young Tom Hall, his Heart-aches and Horses*, which appeared in the *New Monthly* (1851-1853), did not come out as a book till 1927. The objection that his fictions do not contain a plot and are therefore either not novels at all, or else bad ones, is of no real moment. Surtees firmly declined to be led astray by the delusions of plot, and stuck to his business of presenting what he saw, exactly as he saw it—that is to say, very censoriously.<sup>1</sup> Many of his strongest portraits are of rampant types that he detested. Such are Mainchance, Sir Harry Scattercash, Jawleyford, in *Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour*, "one of the rather numerous race of paper-booted, pen-and-ink landowners," whose "communications with his tenantry were chiefly confined to dining with them twice a year in the great entrance-hall, after Mr Screwemtight had eased them of their cash in the steward's room," or the Lord Scamperdale who is said

<sup>1</sup> He sagely observed, in the preface to *Ask Mamma*: "It may be a recommendation to the lover of light literature to be told that the following story does not involve the complication of a plot."

to have been drawn from the same original as Thackeray's Sir Pitt Crawley.<sup>1</sup> Of another class but of the same kidney is the sharp-witted Bowker, in *Handley Cross*, who becomes a paid lecturer for the Anti-Corn-Law League, or the impudent huntsman, Bragg, who victimizes the master in the same novel. In contrast to these, he is still more happy in drawing such hardy and honest countrymen as James Pigg, Enoch Tophill, Jock Haggish, and Jonathan Jobling. These talk in their own harsh dialect, which is however not more racy than the unlicked cockneyisms of Jorrocks.

Surtees was not welcomed by the lover of light literature <sup>A</sup> in his own time or by his fellow-sportsmen; *Handley Cross* <sup>changed</sup> and *Hillingdon Hill* were a long time coming into their own. <sup>note in</sup> Perhaps it was partly that he knew too much; his legal in- <sup>Whyte-</sup> <sup>Melville</sup> formation was astounding, and he did not spare his readers in this or any other branch of his technical knowledge. *Handley Cross* is a veritable text-book of fox-hunting, and it would be risky to suggest that any single one of the rest is less thorough. He did not like the fashionable crowd, and the fashionable crowd did not like him. He was a bluff old philistine who must have seemed a downright cynic to the mid-Victorians. The sporting crowd soon found themselves in a position to show their preference for his younger rival, Whyte-Melville, who was more of their own caste and temper than the man who had stamped some decisive impression of himself on that rich blend of horse-sense, personal competence, and contemptuous self-respect, Mr Jorrocks. Whyte-Melville, whose dips into historical fiction have already been recorded,<sup>2</sup> was a Crimean soldier, a splendid horseman, and a man in society; he had the popular appeal to every class which Surtees refused to cultivate, and of bitterness there was not an ounce in him. So in novel after novel, beginning with *Captain Digby Grand, an Autobiography* (1853), and *Tilbury Nogo, an Unsuccessful Man* (1854), he revived the joys and thrills of the hunting-field, the humours of country-house society, and the giddy whirl of the London season. Alternately with the novels of sport came the historical romances, by no means so sound,

<sup>1</sup> Watson (*op. cit.*, 95); see below, p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 117-118.



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for in that sphere he had not the tact and schooling which made him almost as impeccable as Surtees himself in hunting technique. Only once did he touch upon the shady side of sporting affairs, in the squire, in *Market Harborough*, who had a "knowledge of horseflesh and a sagacity that almost amounts to dishonesty." Whyte-Melville's knowledge and affection went so far that some of the most spirited of his characters, in *Kate Coventry* (1856), for instance, are horses. This is the autobiography of a girl in whose life the London season and the hunting season are the regular recurring episodes. She is a thorough sportswoman, and scandalizes her worsted-knitting and Hannah-More-reading elders with her hoydenish manners; but, fortunately, she has an uncle, who declares he has "never known but one plucky fellow in the world, and that was his little niece Kate." *The Brookes of Bridlemere* (1864), *Contraband* (1871), and *Satanella, a Story of Punchestown* (1872), carried him a decade beyond Surtees, and he left the posthumous *Black and Comely* (1879). Nor must it be forgotten that his Exmoor novel, *Katerfelto*, is pervaded with the hunting spirit, and almost captures the poetic charm of Kingsley's descriptions of the moor, the spinney, and the chase.

*Writers  
of  
facetia*

This was a great age of facetia. That element was one of the great attractions in Pierce Egan's farragos of sport and high jinks, and in the early work of Theodore Hook. Lever and Lover contributed to the entertainment with the antics of their stage Irishmen, in *Harry Lorrequer*, *Charles O'Malley*, and *Handy Andy*. Dickens made his debut with *Sketches by Boz* and *Pickwick*, Thackeray with such things as *The Yellowplush Memoirs* and his contributions to *Punch*. Across the Atlantic, Haliburton had his *Sam Slick* ready before Sam Weller was a year old. It is doubtful whether Jorrocks would have been so diverting had he been born under a different star. For this was also the day of Tom Hood; Charles Lamb was writing as late as the thirties, and he had a feeblor successor in Leigh Hunt. The Rev. R. H. Barham was contributing his *Ingoldsby Legends* to *Bentley's Miscellany* (1837-1843) and the *New Monthly* (1843-1844), the first two series appearing in a collective form (1840-1842) and the

third after his death (1847). Half-a-dozen other humorists who expanded their jests into tales and long stories purporting to be novels must therefore be noted among the phenomena of the time. They were journalists, by profession or by character, who made use of the novel as a medium, but, unlike some of the others named, did nothing to repay the debt, even by bequeathing a character that has stuck in the general memory. Their jokes seem forced and hackneyed now: could they ever have been fresh and lively? Several of these writers, as well as their sprightly heroes, repel nowadays by their lack of feeling, their sheer brutality. Yet many, still alive, read these epical narratives of stupendous hoaxes, these merry-andrew adventures, caricatures and sayings of nagging wives, and gulling of innocents, and were none the worse, though never since the susceptible age have they dreamt of reopening the books.

Henry Cockton (1807-1853) exploited contemporary interest in ventriloquism and the scare about lunatic asylums, in *Valentine Vox, the Ventriloquist* (1840). His hero is a better performer than was ever seen on any platform, and his feats in astonishing, frightening, or simply beguiling a crowd are nothing less than miraculous. All this is farce of the lowliest type; but the episode of the man confined in an asylum and deliberately tortured into madness is an irruption of the literature of horror, under the plea of awakening public opinion. As was the case with Dickens and Charles Reade, legislative reforms which were passed later on have been put to the credit of the novel, rightly or not it is hard to say. Cockton tried to repeat his success in *Sylvester Sound, the Somnambulist* (1844), but found that the trick would not work twice. Albert Smith (1816-1860), the showman of Mont Blanc, some years before he introduced that mountain to Londoners, published several sets of tales and sketches, and novels that had scarcely any more internal coherence, the best of which were *The Adventures of Mr Ledbury* (1844) and *The Pottleton Legacy* (1849). It was the stuff that ought to have been left to the comic papers: facetious accounts of the Derby, the opening of a railway in a country district, and the goings-on of smart young men about town,

Cockton,  
Albert  
Smith,  
and  
Frank  
Smedley

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with more elaborate attempts at Dickensian humours. Not so palpably second-rate and second-hand were the very light novels of Francis Edward Smedley (1816-1864). The friendships and antagonisms of the nice young men and the young bloods, and their larks and feuds and love-making, in *Frank Fairleigh* (1850), are no improvement on Theodore Hook, except that with a better idea of what goes to a well-made novel they run more smoothly. *Lewis Arundel, or the Railroad of Life* (1852), aimed at a higher convention, the drama of society life, and the nemesis of wrong-doing or of loose living. There is good fun in it too, and more in *Harry Coverdale's Courtship, and What came of it* (1855), the history of a sporting squire whose egotisms have to be disciplined by wedlock and other trials.

Douglas  
Jerrold  
and  
"Cuth-  
bert  
Bede"

Two jesters, nay three, for there were two Jerrols, father and son, stand in a class by themselves, or were so regarded; their witticisms were supposed to be of classic rank, though now they are only a reminder how ephemeral is the humour that sports with the things of the hour. Douglas William Jerrold (1803-1857) was a flourishing dramatist, of the Surrey Theatre, Drury Lane, and the Haymarket, and one of the most popular writers of the day, when, even as the author of *Black-eyed Susan* and *The Bride of Ludgate*, he was supposed to have added to his laurels with *Mrs Caudle's Curtain Lectures* (1846), which first had a serial run in *Punch*. His son, William Blanchard Jerrold (1826-1884), inherited some of his wit and was almost as busy and miscellaneous a writer; but has left nothing like that to his name. And who now remembers "Cuthbert Bede," or the Rev. Edward Bradley (1827-1889), who, though he was of University College, Durham, thought it safest to disguise himself under that *alias* when he gave a gloating world *The Adventures of Mr Verdant Green, an Oxford Freshman* (1853-1856), that charivari of undergraduate foolery and gullery? <sup>1</sup> The supplementary *Little Mr Bouncer and his friend Mr Verdant Green* (1857) was only an enlargement of the character-sketch which had met with so much favour.

<sup>1</sup> There were three successive parts: *The Adventures of Mr Verdant Green* (1853), *The Further Adventures of Mr Verdant Green* (1854), and *Mr Verdant Green married and done for* (1856). Of "Cuthbert Bede's" other novels there is an appreciative summary in *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu, and Others*, by S. M. Ellis, 194-196.

## CHAPTER V

### DICKENS

#### I. CHARACTERS AND HUMOURS

How many of these immediate predecessors of his had Dickens *Early* read, and to what effect upon himself? This, with the ques-<sup>life,</sup> tion of his more remote predecessors, arises at once in any <sup>reading,</sup> study of Dickens and his work. There is an ample supply of <sup>etc.</sup> facts about him, the chief of them known to everyone, even to those who have never read the *Life* by his friend Forster, one of the great biographies. Among them are a good few concerning the books he read in childhood and youth, and his precocious impulses to authorship, or at any rate to the telling or retelling of stories and impersonation of characters, the same literary and histrionic impulses which drove him on and on till they drove him prematurely into his grave.<sup>1</sup> History cannot account for genius; its business is with the circumstances that condition the health and activity and help to mould the handiwork of genius. The circumstances of Dickens's boyhood, the poverty, the struggle for a livelihood, the association with all and sundry in the lower and middling classes, had effects upon his mind and character which lasted to the end. So well known is the story that no doubt a good many have thought to themselves that the lot which was his in early days, though sad, gave him exactly the preparation wanted for accomplishing what was to be his great work for humanity. Some may have called it providential. He was apprenticed, from the outset, to that hard existence of the poorest and lowliest which he was to depict with a fellow-feeling and an appeal for sympathy for

<sup>1</sup> See Forster (i. *passim*) on the "readings" and "imagination" of the early years at Chatham, etc., afterwards commemorated in the authors read and the stories retold to please Steerforth, in *David Copperfield*.

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which there had been hardly any precedent save the New Testament. The circumstances determined his subject and outlook; the high-strung, susceptible temperament and the fervid imagination were born in him: what need to look for examples, models, hints, and suggestions? But then, Dickens made an exceptionally early start, and his start was extraordinarily successful; and, on a closer scrutiny, he is seen to have been as responsive as anyone ever was to literary as well as other influences. At first he conformed to the prevailing modes. Dickens would have been a novelist had he never been called upon to rival Pierce Egan and Theodore Hook, who were entertainers rather than novelists. But he found them and their like in possession of the field when he made his debut, and he had to compete with and to a great extent copy them to secure his footing. But, fortunately, he had been brought up on the eighteenth-century classics; and, when after the immense success of *Boz* and *Pickwick* he found himself invested almost with the prerogatives of a dictator, he began to write novels. The plots were stagy. For a long while he had no better model than the crude melodramas of the popular theatre. Dickens was always in close touch with the drama, took part in many performances, and wrote some plays himself. It was a pity that he did not learn his architectonics from the great novelists whose drawing of life and character he knew so well how to appreciate. But in this respect he was a victim to the lure of melodrama to the very last, although about the middle of his career he grew painfully aware of his shortcomings, and tried his hardest to emulate the constructive feats of his friend Wilkie Collins, a better craftsman though far his inferior in creative ability. Many of the mannerisms which he acquired at the beginning, when he was competing with his inferiors, stuck to him right to the end, and left their mark on everything he wrote.

*The two  
autobiog-  
raphies*

Forster incorporated into the *Life* of his friend a fragment of autobiography which Dickens had vaguely intended to complete and publish some day, but eventually decided to work into his novel *David Copperfield*. Dickens had read it "in strict confidence" to his wife, and both she and his son were against

giving it to the public.<sup>1</sup> But there it stands, an intimate and priceless record. Except in the actual order of the events, it tallies with the relevant portions of *David Copperfield*. But what gives inestimable value to the corroboration is that in the pages of the novel can be read an equally truthful and still more intimate narrative of the facts, which are put in the clear perspective suited to a work of fiction. *David Copperfield* is not presented as the autobiography of a man of letters. Evidently, Dickens expressly turned aside from that aspect. But, after all, it does give the history of the childhood and young manhood of the writer who in due time was to produce this living and complete view of himself and the world about him, and that writer is the counterpart of Dickens. It is, in short, an account of the making of the novelist. It tells how the boy's character was tried, his mind shaped, his imagination fed, by all the different things that befell him, the things that befell Dickens. The book in which to study the genesis of all his books up to *David Copperfield*, is *David Copperfield*. Here are recorded the neglect and indifference undergone from his own people, the responsibility being transferred, however, to an imaginary stepfather: the inadequate spell of schooling, the heart-breaking experiences at the blacking warehouse, very slightly disguised, the wanderings in the London streets, the keen-eyed observation, the companionship with unsavoury characters, even the prison scenes in which the Dickens family had figured, only with the substitution of the King's Bench in the Borough for the Marshalsea. David, like Dickens, was ten years old when he escaped from the warehouse and was put to school.<sup>2</sup> The dread that he might grow up ignorant and unfit for a decent manhood, the anxiety about his education which troubled David as much as his physical sufferings, no doubt afflicted Dickens too. Dickens had gone through the same

<sup>1</sup> See the eldest son's introduction to *David Copperfield* (1892). Dickens evidently shrank from publishing the history of his adversities and humiliations, and his wife thought he had been unduly harsh towards his father and mother. Both she and his son deprecated the publication of this fragment.

<sup>2</sup> Wellington House Academy, in Mornington Place, was the original for Salem House, Blackheath, with some allowances for fiction. The proprietor, Mr Jones, "a most ignorant fellow, and a mere tyrant," was a pretty good match for Creakle (Forster, i. 45).

miseries and agonies, and, like David, without being demoralized or embittered. He knew from experience what it was to be a waif in London. Well for the happiness of the world at large that he went through all that, though at what cost to his own happiness! For David would fain have blotted it all out.

No one has ever raised that curtain since. I have lifted it for a moment, even in this narrative, with a reluctant hand, and dropped it gladly. The remembrance of that life is fraught with so much pain to me, with so much mental suffering and want of hope, that I have never had the courage even to examine how long I was doomed to lead it. Whether it lasted for a year, or more, or less, I do not know. I only know that it was, and ceased to be; and that I have written, and there I leave it.<sup>1</sup>

*The  
books and  
authors  
he loved  
best*

Dickens portrayed his counterpart as a high-strung, very intelligent, observant, and studious boy, who fortunately comes across a collection of excellent books, which he devours. These are the books that Dickens read before he left Chatham to go to London and the warehouse, and few of them but the *Arabian Nights* and *Tales of the Genii* are likely to go into the hands of most boys till later than the age of ten. Smollett is put first, with his three masterpieces; then come Fielding, with *Tom Jones*, Goldsmith, Cervantes, Le Sage, and Defoe, with *Robinson Crusoe*, a book he was always drawing upon for similes and quotations.<sup>2</sup> Dickens had a particular liking for Smollett, whose savage, corrosive irony would seem to go only with his sterner and rarer moods. How is it he was not more powerfully attracted by the more amiable tone and greater friendliness of Fielding? The boy was no doubt spellbound by the rush of incident in Smollett, there was never a story-teller to beat him. But Dickens, when grown up, always preferred Smollett, and the reasons are not unfathomable. Smollett's hard-heartedness was a myth, as the future novelist probably saw at once, if he had heard of it. And the humour and satire that appealed to Dickens was the open and obvious laughter of Smollett, rather than that which

<sup>1</sup> *David Copperfield*, xv.

<sup>2</sup> "That book interested Dickens as did no other work" (Wright, 206).

was veiled in irony and urbanity, such as Fielding's. He himself had not the calm intelligence and high serenity of Fielding; he was too moody, too liable to outbreaks of furious resentments, with all his warmth of heart, which was stirred as readily by indignation as by pity, tenderness, or enthusiasm. As to Goldsmith, he read *The Vicar of Wakefield* first, but he also soon came to love the essayist and to revel in *The Bee* and *The Citizen of the World*. *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, and *The Idler* are on record as in the little library which the boy read over and over again, and Mrs Inchbald's *Collection of Farces*, which ran into seven volumes—did he read them all? <sup>1</sup> Then, and later on, he must have been fairly omnivorous, for he read and speedily forgot plenty of voyages and travels, and was familiar with the essayists of his own time, with the Waverley novels, and probably with a large proportion of the good, bad, and indifferent fiction then available, since, according to the preface to *Pickwick*, he had "shed innumerable tears" over "certain interminable novels" that used to be hawked about the country by pedlars in his boyhood. Pierce Egan and Theodore Hook were of course well known, for he had, or else chose, to follow at first in their wake; and George Colman the younger, whose *Broad Grins* amused him, was assuredly not the only one of the contemporary Joe Millers that fascinated with their comic sketches of Covent Garden and other scenes about town.<sup>2</sup> Some books off the beaten track are mentioned in the *Life* or in his works. Holbein's *Dance of Death* fell in his way<sup>3</sup>; he alludes to Scott's *Demonology and Witchcraft*<sup>4</sup>; and asks a friend in a letter about *Oliver Twist* if he had read Defoe's *History of the Devil*.<sup>5</sup>

Reading and observation, the latter including the most poignant personal experiences, were all this time going hand in hand. As to experience and observation, no writer ever drew more directly or more recognizably from that vital source. No one ever knew the town better. Dickens read

<sup>1</sup> Forster, i. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Sketches by Box*—"Shabby-genteel People."

<sup>5</sup> Forster, i. 84. It is recorded that he became a reader at the British Museum the moment he was eligible—i.e. on his eighteenth birthday (Ley's ed. of Forster, 53).



the streets like a book and remembered every word. But his recollections of Chatham and Rochester and the country round about were just as vivid, just as minute; his first novel and his last and also *Great Expectations* avouch it; and in novel, short story, and such a sketch-book as *The Uncommercial Traveller*, he was to evince in the widest range the same habits of roving but precise observation, mastery of detail, and telling description, with a rare faculty for conveying a sense of what it all meant for flesh and spirit. It is not too much to say that he is more profound in his descriptions of visible things than in his drawing of human character. It is because his pictorial method required more than mechanical accuracy that he was so powerful at evoking atmosphere. As yet, however, this talent was immature. He did not penetrate far below the outward and visible in the scrap-book which he put together out of his contributions to various newspapers and magazines in *Sketches by Boz* (1835-1836). Before and while he was writing these papers Dickens had been working as a reporter at Doctors' Commons and in the House. They are journalism in origin, and have a certain air of reporter's work, the stamp of the newspaper showman. But, at any rate, it is the stamp of the higher journalism. Dickens obtained his specification for a novel from his reading and re-reading in the classics, in Smollett, Fielding, Goldsmith, Scott, and the rest,<sup>1</sup> and from a prudent acquaintanceship with the works that the public liked or at least accepted with great equanimity from his contemporaries. The *Sketches* are of two sorts, the one a form of what Bishop Hall had denominated charactery,<sup>2</sup> the other fiction. On the whole, the former are much the better. They include, not only the set formally headed "Characters," but also some of the items described as "Tales," and much in another group called "Scenes," comprising such pieces as "The Streets," "Seven Dials," "Doctors' Commons," "Private Theatres," and the

<sup>1</sup> "The rest" does not include Jane Austen, whose *Emma* he had not read when he was accused of copying Miss Bates in *Mrs Nickleby* (Forster, i. 100).

<sup>2</sup> See Volume II. xiv. "Drawing out the true humanity of every vertue and vis . . . which Art they significantly tearmed Charactery" (*Recollection of Treatises*, 1614, p. 221).

seven memorable sketches under the head of "Our Parish." This was a genre in which Leigh Hunt was shining; his studies of places and people, in one periodical and another, were in a manner as old as Goldsmith and as recent as Charles Lamb, but more circumstantial in their local colour and more personal and sociable in their human features, more free and easy and at the same time more trivial. They often approached the novel, sometimes more than half-way. The likeness of Boz to Leigh Hunt in the *Sketches* is close and obvious.<sup>1</sup> There was a much finer model available, however, in Washington Irving's *Sketch-Book* (1819); and, if Dickens was not more substantially indebted to Irving in this instance, or to *Bracebridge Hall* (1822) in the later Christmas books and stories and general festivity of the season, he could not help having that exemplar in his mind's eye.<sup>2</sup> Further, the prevailing facetiousness of tone and the caricatures, or rather the comically exaggerated types, not in this case to be compared with Smollett's, show that Dickens was well acquainted with Hook's stories, and knew the popularity value of such a style. Theodore's habitual mixing of farce and seriousness, sensation and sentiment, in domestic middle-class fiction, may even have given him a lead in the novels presently to follow.<sup>3</sup> In the *Sketches*, however, it was chiefly the shading of the character proper into what was vulgarly known as the "take-off" that was appropriated from Hook.

In this first bid of his, Dickens naturally drew upon his *Contents* most recent and lightest and most agreeable experiences, *of the* though he did not quite ignore the darker tones. The very "Sketches" first of his efforts that he was to see in print,<sup>4</sup> at which event he had to retire into Westminster Hall to hide his tears of

<sup>1</sup> R. Brimley Johnson noticed the indebtedness (*Leigh Hunt*, 1896), and Professor Saintsbury confirms his opinion (*Cambridge Lit. Hist.*, xiii. x.).

<sup>2</sup> Dickens knew Washington Irving as an author, and proposed later on to write travel sketches of places, people, local tales and legends, "after the plan of Washington Irving's *Albion*" (Forster, i. 149), a project not accepted by his publishers. He afterwards told Irving how he would have liked to go in his company into Little Britain, East Cheap, and Westminster Abbey, and compare notes with the author of the *Sketch-Book* (Wright, 146).

<sup>3</sup> See above (218-219) on what Dickens learned from Hook, with the references to the views of Brightfield and Dibelius. The present writer cannot subscribe to the pages on pages of alleged plagiarisms or suggestions from Hook in the latter's study.

<sup>4</sup> Under the original title of "A Dinner at Poplar Walk."

joy and pride, is the second of the "Tales." "Mr Minns and his Cousin" gives barely a hint of the future Dickens, though the contrast of the moneyed curmudgeon of a City man and the coarse affability of the designing kinsman, with his confounded dog, and the facile irony of the bus that will not start and the other which at the climax leaves Minns in the lurch, are motives that he was often to play with. The election for beadle, in "Our Parish," and the uproarious burlesque of officialdom and self-complacent philanthropy, air one of his everlasting grudges, against the Big-wigs; and another tale, "Horatio Sparkins," about the exquisite unmasked as a draper's counter-jumper, is a clear case of that snobbish anti-snobbishness of Dickens which is vulgarity itself. There is more of the same in "Shabby-genteel People," the easy-going farce of which is more palatable than the satire. The characters are generalized types; he was soon to discriminate, but had not learned the way. Such a laboured comedy of errors as "The Great Winglebury Duel," with the unpremeditated flight to Gretna Green, if compared with other elopements, in *Pickwick*, for instance, shows that he did learn very quickly. But the "Scenes" best display the alertness of the man who, as Bagehot said, "describes London like a special correspondent for posterity."<sup>1</sup> Some show that extensive and peculiar information which is the appanage of the reporter, for example, "A Parliamentary Sketch." Dickens had done more than take down speeches; he had looked into Bellamy's kitchen, and knew why the metropolitan members were unpopular there: they "always dined at home"; and why it was absolutely unconstitutional to give Ireland further representation:

"Why, sir, an Irish member would go up there, and eat more dinner than three English members put together. He took no wine; drank table-beer by the half-gallon; and went home to Manchester-buildings, or Millbank-street, for his whisky-and-water."

Some of the dialogue is excellent; there are even a few Wellerisms in the raw; and the brisk, jolly, vivid style was

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Studies*, ed. R. H. Hutton, ii. 141.

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never to alter materially, only to grow better and better. Already Dickens has acquired the art of telling a whole story in a long sentence that does not seem long, and of that happy picturing of a whole scene in the same way:

Uncle George tells stories, and carves poultry, and jokes with the children at the side-table, and winks at the cousins, that are making love, or being made love to, and exhilarates everybody with his good humour and hospitality; and when, at last, a stout servant staggers in with a gigantic pudding, with a sprig of holly in the top, there is such a laughing, and shouting, and clapping of little chubby hands, and kicking up of fat dumpy legs, as can only be equalled by the applause with which the astonishing feat of pouring lighted brandy into mince-pies, is received by the younger visitors. Then the dessert!—and the wine!—and the fun!

This, from "The Christmas Dinner," almost persuades that Dickens, like his characters, never changed or developed, but came on the scene exactly the same in age and spirit as he was to remain at the end.

The "Sketches of Young Gentlemen" and "Sketches of *Addenda* Young Couples," which are nowadays appended to *Sketches to the* by Boz, appeared in 1838 and 1840, and so are post-Pickwick, like "The Mudfog Papers," which preceded them in *Bentley's Magazine*, but had to wait till 1880 for posthumous publication as a book. These last, a skit on the British Association, are on a par with "Bill Stumps His Mark," in *Pickwick*. It is the levity, and impudence, and foolish irony of a street urchin; and there is plenty of the same pertness, cocksureness, and other foibles of precocious cleverness throughout these papers. From first to last, Dickens was incapable of self-criticism. Faults of taste have always to be remedied by his devoted readers on the principle of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Turn from these to "The Couple who Coddle Themselves," and contemplate Mr Merrywinkle going to business on a damp morning:

He puts on wash-leather socks over his stockings, and india-rubber shoes above his boots, and wears under his waistcoat a cuirass of hare-skin. Besides these precautions,

he winds a thick shawl round his throat, and blocks up his mouth with a large silk handkerchief. Thus accoutred, and furnished besides with a great-coat and umbrella, he braves the dangers of the streets; travelling in severe weather at a gentle trot, the better to preserve the circulation, and bringing his mouth to the surface to take breath but very seldom, and with the utmost caution. His office door opened, he shoots past his clerk at the same pace, and diving into his own private room, closes the door, examines the window fastenings, and gradually unrobes himself: hanging his pocket-handkerchief on the fender to air, and determining to write to the newspapers about the fog, which, he says, "has really got to that pitch that it is quite unbearable."

Dickens's amusement at the doings of British Associations and of the humbler but more pretentious societies which were then as plentiful as they are now, soon found vent in his account of the antics of the Pickwick Club.

"*The  
Pickwick  
Papers*"

It must be borne in mind how *The Pickwick Papers* originated. Dickens was called upon to supply letterpress for the "Cockney-sporting plates of a superior sort" in which a popular artist was to surpass his previous efforts and outdo the illustrated works published under the banner of "Jorrock's" and other heroes. Dickens was no sportsman, and the idea of the Nimrod Club suggested by Chapman and Hall was somewhat embarrassing; but being allowed to take his own way he happily "thought of Mr Pickwick," made him the president of a club of harmless lunatics, and produced the first number. His job was to extemporize characters, and some sort of a tale to show them off; and, naturally, he fell back upon the loose, primeval scheme of the picaresque chronicle. His characters would develop and others would occur to his imagination, as he went on; and in the same fortuitous way he would hit upon misadventures, coincidences, surprises, that would keep readers on the gape. Mr Seymour, the illustrator, committed suicide before many drawings were completed. He had contributed nothing to the idea, and his place was soon taken by Phiz. Dickens had introduced the Pickwickians, and taken them down into Kent, where they saw the great review at Chatham, and fell in with the Wardles. The visit to Dingley Dell followed, with

incidental caricatures of "sport," in Mr Winkle's horsemanship, the shooting, and the cricket match. Mr Jingle had attached himself to the party, which event led to the first stirring episode, his elopement with Miss Rachel and the pursuit by Mr Wardle and Mr Pickwick.

All this was mildly entertaining, but nothing worthy of *Weller* immortality had yet appeared. Dickens had reached a point when he was probably at a loss what to do with his amiable, *Pickwick* good-natured, elderly hero, who was evidently not meant to be a butt, like Mr Winkle; he was simple, but not a simpleton, a sort of minor Allworthy, or a Parson Adams or Mr Primrose, without as yet any such opportunities as those gentlemen had enjoyed of impressing themselves upon their small worlds. As yet he had exhibited hardly the shreds of a personality. How was the improvisation of the moment to be made to sustain interest through the hundreds of pages assigned to his *Odyssey*? It has often been noticed that his character now undergoes a considerable transformation. For, next morning, Wardle and Pickwick enter the inn-yard at the "White Hart," and come across Sam Weller cleaning a pair of shoes. As soon as Sam Weller dawned upon Charles Dickens the problem was solved. In a brief space, Sam has become Mr Pickwick's servant and right-hand man; and, almost automatically, the pair fall into the time-honoured relation of Sancho and his master. It is improbable that any formal correspondence was intended; the conjunction develops itself naturally and inevitably. Sam's realism and common sense, expounded with a wit and humour as unlike as possible to Sancho's stolidity, serve exactly the same purpose, to correct his master's perilous idealism, and save him from the deceptions of a wicked world.<sup>1</sup> Now, at length, Mr Pickwick's pure unselfishness and childlike trust in the integrity of mankind can be exercised with safety and effect, for so far as warm-heartedness goes Sam is always

<sup>1</sup> It may be fanciful, but Sam Weller's trenchant common sense and impish humour often seem to suggest another Samuel, the author of *Erewhon*. One is almost tempted to give an esoteric meaning to Sam's accidental remark to Arabella: "I only assisted natur', ma'am; as the doctor said to the boy's mother arter he'd bled him to death." Butler, it is worth noting, put Mr Pickwick with Hamlet and Don Quixote among "the great characters of fiction" that "live as truly as the memories of dead men" (*Note-Books*, ed. H. Festing Jones, 217).

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ready to second his master. A vision of the incessant conflict of good and evil pervades the novels of Dickens. It is the basis of their philosophy, if they have one, and also of their æsthetics—the beauty of good and the ugliness of evil. Charity and intelligence are the weapons to be wielded, since half the evil is the result of mere stupidity and lack of feeling, as Dickens keeps on reiterating in his satire of abuses. Pickwick is the champion of good-will; and admonished by his shrewder henchman he becomes the champion of his creator's whole view of life, which never ignored the villainy, cruelty, and imposture apparently inherent in the mass of human beings, yet firmly believed that kindness, charity, and heroism would ultimately conquer. Only a generous faith as well as a clear and comprehensive knowledge, with Dickens's awareness of the Fagins, Sikeses, Chuzzlewits, Chadbands, and Heeps, could have bodied forth the courage and self-devotion of the master of the *Golden Mary* or of the redeemed sinner, Captain Richard Doubledick.<sup>1</sup> Dickens knew the worst in humanity, yet believed in the best. He thought that nothing was superhuman. Pickwick's heroism is exercised in homelier circumstances, but is none the less genuine. This is a comic story. But Mr Pickwick's quixotry in going into the Fleet rather than acquiesce in the iniquities of legal chicanery, and his generosity to the scamps who wronged him, are anything but absurd. It is continually said of Dickens that he could not draw a gentleman; he usually failed when he tried to, but he succeeded when this was not his conscious intention. Pickwick is surely his democratic idea of a gentleman, serenely maintaining his dignity and equanimity, sensibility and delicacy, in all circumstances, some very trying. Dickens can bear the comparison with Cervantes.

*Characters, not character*

Dickens's affair was with characters, not with character,<sup>2</sup> to portray the infinite diversity of mankind, not to analyse the individual; his genius was for the extensive not the intensive vision. In *Pickwick* he displays the fertility of our greatest "character-monger," to borrow Dr Johnson's word for Fanny

<sup>1</sup> *Christmas Stories*—"The Wreck of the *Golden Mary*" and "The Seven Poor Travellers."

<sup>2</sup> See Volume VI. 208-209.

Burney.<sup>1</sup> There are nearly a hundred names in the list of dramatis personæ prefixed to most editions of *The Pickwick Papers*; but it has been computed that about three hundred and fifty persons come on the scene in some rôle or another. A very large proportion must have been drawn from people whom he had known. Pickwick himself is a composite being, and idealized too; his fellow-Pickwickians, Tupman, Snodgrass, and Winkle, Dickens probably evolved for the occasion from his inner consciousness. He had not yet got into his stride. Yet, for the rest of the diversified multitude, a very slight acquaintance, a mere glance, seems to have been suggestion enough in most cases.<sup>2</sup> He vouchsafes not a glimpse of what goes on below the surface, though his intuition so far was unerring, and everyone behaves with self-evident consistency. They are all people with conspicuous peculiarities or obvious resemblances to familiar types, the peculiarities strengthened to make the flavour unmistakable, as in the strong ale, the best ever brewed, known as "Samson with his hair on," in *Mr Nightingale's Diary*.<sup>3</sup>

Mr Pickwick with his grave outlook on life holds the miscellaneous book together; but the great character is Sam Weller, the realistic philosopher, like Sancho a make-weight to idealism, hard-headed, but brimming over with a vitality, a humour, and a poetry of his own. In him the sharpness of the street arab is sublimated into unerring sanity; his nonsense is wisdom in masquerade. He hardly requires it, but he has an admirable complement in the elder Mr Weller, that riper and milder sage, with a wit and wisdom more profound. A character of such richness as Sam's could not but beget such a father. Except one or two colourless individuals such as Mr Wardle, survivors from the original draft of the story, the rest of the characters are miscellaneous species of rogue or humbug,

<sup>1</sup> Dr Johnson's name for Fanny Burney (see Volume V. 157).

<sup>2</sup> Such was his way. Harrison Ainsworth gave him an introductory letter to James Crossley, when Dickens visited Manchester, explaining, "I rather suspect he is reconnoitring for character." Among the booty brought back were the Cheeryble brothers (*Nicholas Nickleby*), drawn from "William and Daniel Grant, the wealthy and benevolent calico-printers of Cannon Street, in that city," who arrived from Scotland in a penniless condition, but by industry and honest dealing attained immense wealth (Ainsworth, i. 339-341).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Ward, 94.



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or of mere human absurdity, of the stamp of Mr Pott, editor of the *Eatanswill Gazette*, or jealous Mr Peter Magnus, or that curiosity, the Fat Boy. The Leo Hunters are superfine examples of the humbugs, with whom may be grouped the various types of snob, a whole galaxy of which figure in the account of Mr Pickwick's sojourn in Bath.<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Mr Stiggins may be put among the humbugs or the rogues, according to taste, this latter division ranging from Mr Jingle and his faithful Job Trotter, and Messrs Dodson and Fogg, to the unfortunates in the Fleet, who are largely contemplated, however, as the victims of society, and the text for an eloquent appeal for reform. It is a question whether those charlatans, Messrs Benjamin Allen and Bob Sawyer, should go among the rogues or the humbugs; they are both one and the other, but their part in the book is pre-eminently that of merry-andrews. They are scarcely a serious hit at the pious frauds of the medical profession. There are more of both categories in the excellent inset stories.

*A form-  
less  
mixture  
of all  
sorts*

Dickens started writing *The Pickwick Papers* with the mere vestiges of a plan before him; the book is a huge improvisation. The result was the chaos out of which fictitious worlds might be created; potentially, it is all Dickens's novels. It comprehends all the groups and classes and all the types which were to appear in his later fiction. It contains in embryo all the motives which he was to employ, though the predominant tone is that of comedy and farce. But the admirable sanity even of his nonsense redeems the most grotesque farce and extravaganza. There was nothing lofty about any of this. Dickens had uncommon sensibility to common things. He represented the people; he liked what they liked, and more than anyone before or since understood the infinite variety of their likes and dislikes, a freedom and variety which they prized and of which almost unconsciously they were most proud. Like them, again, he was satisfied with his divinations and not given

<sup>1</sup> A slip of Dickens in one of the Bath episodes may have been corrected already. Mr Pickwick and his friends are stated to have rooms in the Royal Crescent, and here it is that Mr Winkle in his night attire jumps into Mrs Dowler's sedan chair, and being evicted is chased by Dowler "round and round the Crescent." But it was evidently the Circus that Dickens was thinking about, which provided the very course required for Winkle's gyrations, as the Crescent did not.

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to reflection; he merely had keener intuitions than anyone else, and was as incapable of reflecting as anybody. Even his satire is merely impulsive, though it did not stop easily when it had once begun; hence his irrepressible laughter at the absurdities of snobs and big-wigs, of officialdom and the law, is all the more deadly from the apparent effort to keep it under and maintain the neutral tone of a friendly humorist.

For pedestrian purposes and for the dialogue which became *His style* inevitably the chief vehicle of his character-drawing and satire, Dickens was now in command of a style hardly to be bettered. Academic criticism has disparaged that style because it is not free from some grammatical inaccuracies which would have been eradicated had Dickens gone to the same school as his reviewers. But the folly of insisting on these negative qualities is that the rare excellence of the positive merits is overlooked.<sup>1</sup> Dickens formed his style on the best models; he made it his own, developed it, and often surpassed the great models that he once plodded behind at a modest interval. His masters were Smollett and Fielding, and the great essayists, including Leigh Hunt as well as Lamb. In *Sketches by Boz* he was often stilted, and often fell back upon Johnsonese. In *Pickwick*, the eponymous hero is the only one who often speaks in the voice of Dr Johnson; and it is usually with such dramatic propriety that it cannot be called a blemish. As well carp at the pompous phraseology of the Fat Boy, in his heavier moments! But, truly, as Sir Adolphus Ward long ago pointed out, it is difficult to find a page of Dickens not containing "one of those supremely felicitous phrases" in the mintage of which he excelled.<sup>2</sup> He had an infallible sense for the right word, not only when Sam Weller called Pickwick "an angel."

"I never heerd, mind you, nor read of in story-books, nor see in picters, any angel in tights and gaiters—not even in spectacles as I remember, though that may ha' been done for anythin' I know to the contrairey—but mark my vords, Job Trotter, he's

<sup>1</sup> "Education furst, and ganius afterwards," as Mr Yellowplush observes in his "Ajew."

<sup>2</sup> *Dickens (English Men of Letters)*, 26 and *passim*.

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a reg'lar thorough-bred angel for all that; and let me see the man as wenturs to tell me he knows a better vun."<sup>1</sup>

Many phrases have grown proverbial: "Not knowin': can't say," "In tears and white muslin,"<sup>2</sup> ladies who "ferment themselves into hysterics." The names and by-names have become household words, like Tartuffe, Shylock, Dr Pangloss, Iago, Cinderella, Paul Pry, Don Quixote. Take Bumble, Stiggins, Pecksniff and Chadband, Mrs Gamp, Bill Sikes, Mark Tapley, Uriah Heep; take the Circumlocution Office, Dodson and Fogg, Dotheboys Hall—they are permanent safeguards against certain social frauds and abominations! His very malapropisms have a certain classical aroma—"reduced counsels," or "patent Brahmins"<sup>3</sup>; or Mr Weller's "dispensary," "a reg'lotion of natur'" against female enticements to coachmen.

"A dispensation," said Sam, correcting the old gentleman. "Wery good, Samivel, a dispensation, if you like it better," returned Mr Weller; "I call it a dispensary, and it's always writ up so, at the places vere they gives you physic for nothin' in your own bottles; that's all."

Not merely does everyone speak in character in the dialogue, each has a distinctive style.

Here Mrs Weller let fall some more tears, and Mr Stiggins groaned.

"Hallo! Here's this unfort'nate gen'l'm'n took ill agin," said Sam, looking round. "Were do you feel it now, sir?"

"In the same place, young man," rejoined Mr Stiggins, "in the same place."

"Were may that be, sir?" inquired Sam, with great outward simplicity.

"In the buzzim, young man," replied Mr Stiggins, placing his umbrella on his waistcoat.

At this affecting reply, Mrs Weller, being wholly unable to

<sup>1</sup> *Pickwick*, xlv.

<sup>2</sup> With the variant, "In a flood of tears, and a sedan chair." "The dowager Lady Snuphanuph and two other ladies of an ancient and whist-like appearance" is also good.

<sup>3</sup> "I can't keep her away from me. If I was locked up in a fire-proof chest with a patent Brahmin, she'd find means to get at me, Sammy" (*Ibid.*, lii.).

suppress her feelings, sobbed aloud, and stated her conviction that the red-nosed man was a saint; whereupon Mr Weller, senior, ventured to suggest, in an undertone, that he must be the representative of the united parishes of Saint Simon Without, and Saint Walker Within.

"I'm afeerd, mum," said Sam, "that this here gen'l'm'n, with the twist in his countenance, feels rayther thirsty with the melancholy spectacle afore him. Is it the case, mum?"

The worthy lady looked at Mr Stiggins for a reply; that gentleman, with many rollings of the eye, clenched his throat with his right hand, and mimicked the act of swallowing, to intimate that he was athirst.

"I am afraid, Samuel, that his feelings have made him so, indeed," said Mrs Weller, mournfully.

"Wot's your usual tap, sir?" replied Sam.

"Oh, my dear young friend," replied Mr Stiggins, "all taps is vanities!"

"Too true, too true, indeed," said Mrs Weller, murmuring a groan, and shaking her head assentingly.

"Well," said Sam, "I des-say they may be, sir; but vich is your partickler wanity? Vich wanity do you like the flavour on best, sir?"

"Oh, my dear young friend," replied Mr Stiggins, "I despise them all. If," said Mr Stiggins, "if there is any one of them less odious than another, it is the liquor called rum. Warm, my dear young friend, with three lumps of sugar in the tumbler."

"Wery sorry to say, sir," said Sam, "that they don't allow that partickler wanity to be sold in this here establishment."

"Oh, the hardness of heart of these inveterate men!" ejaculated Mr Stiggins. "Oh, the accursed cruelty of these inhuman persecutors!"

With these words, Mr Stiggins again cast up his eyes, and rapped his breast with his umbrella; and it is but justice to the reverend gentleman to say, that his indignation appeared very real and unfeigned indeed.<sup>1</sup>

But several of his great talkers surpass this considerably. Take almost any conversation in which Mrs Gamp holds forth, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*; the diction is capable at once of a racy sententiousness and of the wildest flights of grotesque

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imagination, and falls into a natural rhythm which too often may be scanned as irregular blank verse. Mrs Nickleby, in the novel named after her son, Mrs Chivery in *Little Dorrit*, Mrs Lirriper in *Christmas Stories*, and many more, each has a style of native eloquence as distinct from anyone else's as Sam Weller's or that of Serjeant Buzfuz; and it is an interesting study how finely differentiated is the rhetoric of Mr Micawber from that of his helpmeet, even when their hearts beat as one. And his command of pompous paraphrase,<sup>1</sup> of rigmarole and claptrap, parliamentary, journalistic, and other, must go down to the credit of Dickens. He had styles, which is a much more valuable acquisition to a novelist than merely to have a style of his own.

"*Oliver  
Twist*"

By letting his inventive fertility and fantastic humour have free play, with such resounding success as *The Pickwick Papers* met with on every hand, Dickens emancipated himself from the restraints and hesitations of youth and inexperience and from undue reliance on existing models. Before he reached the end of this book he was at work upon two others; whether *Oliver Twist* or *Nicholas Nickleby* was actually begun first is not known, though the one came out a year before the other, this other not being finished before a third was in hand. He was now in easy circumstances; and he chose to write, not sketches or more papers, but two novels of the regulation pattern externally, though otherwise in anything but the conventional manner. *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* (1838), on the face of it, was a blow at Ainsworth's and Lytton's idealization of crime and the criminal; a counterblast to *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard*, *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram*.<sup>2</sup> He saw no reason, he said in the preface attached thirty years later, why the dregs of life "should not serve the purposes of a moral." He had read glorifications of thievery and worse by the score, from the *Beggar's Opera* to *Paul Clifford*, both of which he good-humouredly exempted from censure,

<sup>1</sup> What Ward, no doubt, meant by "that humorous species of paraphrase which . . . has also been the most persistently imitated" (*English Men of Letters*, 207).

<sup>2</sup> Thackeray undertook to eschew even Dickens's sentimental forbearance in his retort to all such tales of roguery and crime, *Catherine*, which appeared in *Fraser* (1839-1840).

the one as a satire, the other for vague reasons which would hardly stand analysis—Lytton was a friend of his. His object was to tell the truth; to show how crime is bred, and that vice systematically pursued does not yield the delights gaily asserted by the romancers. In 1867 he still resolutely affirms: "It is true . . . it is emphatically God's truth." But, having adopted the framework of a novel with the trademark of a plot, he could not help bringing in much that was not exactly God's truth. Oliver's childhood in the workhouse and his far-echoing request for "more" may be condoned in a tract upon the Poor Law, even though it was a little out of date.<sup>1</sup> But, outside the workhouse, Oliver, though the titular hero, is only a lay figure, his innocence in the midst of corruption only a sentimental evasion, and his villainous half-brother Monks, plotting the child's demoralization and ruin for the sake of the inheritance and dogging him with savage and inexplicable hatred, crude melodrama. Dickens was right in calling attention afterwards, not to this pious romancing, but to the veracity in his study of Sikes and Nancy, the human brute and the poor brutalized creature who clings desperately to the rags and tatters of her womanhood. There is just an allusion in this same preface to the Artful Dodger, none to the merry picaro, Charley Bates; and Fagin is not recalled to mind, rightly in this context, for the terrible, leering Jew was an excursion of his grotesque and gruesome fancy, with but a tenuous hold on real life. Nor was it worth while to mention Noah Claypole, complete type of those debased natures who bully what is weaker and toady that which is higher than themselves. Assuredly, in the two who are in effect the protagonists of the story, Dickens did not flinch from the stern realism which at a later period was given a longer name. Sikes is consistent and fearful, the ghastly concomitants of his crime are in perfect keeping, and the drama of his last moments is as grim and irrefutable an

<sup>1</sup> His satirical protests often bore eventual fruit in much-needed reforms. One sketch in *Oliver Twist* had immediate results. Fang, the police magistrate, was drawn from Mr Laing, whose vile temper and brutality were notorious. Dickens went to his police court and took notes on the spot. Soon after the publication of the novel, Laing was removed by the Home Secretary (Forster, ii. 109-110).

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admonition as holy writ.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Dickens yielded a little to feeling in the passages where Nancy makes her despairing efforts to enlist help for Oliver—Oliver is so unreal! But it was truth when she returned to her own hopeless lot rather than accept the benevolent offer of Rose Maylie. With few lapses she is drawn consistently, and is in every respect a tragic figure. It was fortunate, however, that Dickens did not pursue this particular line, with characters as dreadful as Sikes and as revolting as Claypole, drawn with a realism improved by practice from an experience that seems inexhaustible. The comedy and humour of the novels that supervened were cheap even at the price of ramshackle plots and plentiful disregard of verisimilitude.

*Novels approximating to the conventional pattern*

After this blend of the crime novel and the novel of sentiment Dickens went in for a different mixture. The plot of *Oliver Twist* had been not so much a loose fit as a coupling of opposites, truth adulterated with make-believe. He encumbered himself with another scandal crying out for exposure in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), a longer novel with a complicated and unwieldy plot, the object of which is to bring into forced contact as odd a collection of human beings as were ever put into a book. True, there were more of these oddities in *Pickwick*; but the *Pickwick* people were not meant for the set encountered by an average person in the ordinary contingencies of life, but rather for all the ordinary and extraordinary individuals observed in a pretty considerable tour in search of experiences. The president of the Pickwick Club sallied out with his sapient colleagues to see the world, and see it they did. *Pickwick* is a bird's-eye view of English life. But Dickens's object in all his novels was to present a world peopled with heterogeneous characters, and to tell such stories as would set them off in all

<sup>1</sup> Mr Chesterton laments that Sikes and some other villains in the novels have no redeeming features; wherefore Dickens is "melodramatic" in his emphasis on evil, and "might be called a vulgar pessimist" (*Charles Dickens*, 1906). His remark, "Bill Sikes is not exactly a real man, but for all that he is a real murderer," is more interesting (*Criticisms and Appreciations*, 1911). A relevant comparison, overlooked by most students of Dickens, is with Crabbe. *The Borough* appeared in 1810, and in "Peter Grimes" contains a story on all fours with the serious parts of *Oliver Twist*. Grimes is just such another as Gamfield the chimney sweep, who takes boys from the workhouse and sweats them to death. It is, of course, well known that the murder of Nancy and the death of Sikes were Dickens's most successful "readings."

their humorous contrasts. Would not the tale of random adventure, even the old-fashioned picaresque novel, on the principle that odd adventures are for the odd adventurer, have suited his purpose better than the plot centring in a mystery to be solved or a wrong to be righted, with every one in the miscellaneous crowd contributing something to the prescribed result? Surely, this was a convention which he ought to have rejected, had he realized the nature of his own genius. But apparently it did not occur to Dickens that there were better ways of showing off his varied assortment of originals, although the means he actually chose hampered him with an extra set of characters, not observed and treasured up, but improvised to run the machinery—stage figures, in short, whose part was to hate and persecute, love and betray, or cheat and abuse the real people, those into whose veins he had poured the life-blood of his genius. Some of his plots have excited admiration; he was tutored by Wilkie Collins, and took great pains with the later ones. But the novels now coming into view are tangled up with improbabilities and obscure complications which seriously detract from clarity and interest. It is only by an effort that the reader is able to orient himself, find roughly where he is in the march of incident, and guess whither he is being led. How much better to have been allowed simply to watch these delectable creatures perform their antics, to have looked on without the least anxiety about their ultimate lot, with feelings unwrung by the spectacle of ill luck or gross injustice? This haphazard but more lifelike way would even have resulted in a more organic unity. For the characters which Dickens had to set in action were perfectly competent to play out their own tragedies and comedies without the help of auxiliaries from the professional stage. And, further, would not this unfettered, easy-going method have been far better adapted to the exigencies of serial publication? Plots refuse to be extemporized as a work goes on. Yet Dickens had so to extemporize, correct, and reshape. He liked to have a dramatic climax in each instalment. But such climaxes he had to contrive as best he could, with the tale in progress, perhaps half finished. The climaxes happen somehow or anyhow, surprising the writer



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perhaps almost as much as they surprise the reader. But with only the rough elements of a plan, and the remoter antecedents, perhaps the mainspring, of the required situation gone beyond recall, it is not to be wondered at that Dickens often seems clumsy and uncertain over the hinges and connexions and all the finer details of his plot business. How much better to have left plot and everything pertaining to it to those who had no other assets—except perchance such as they borrowed from him!

“*Nicholas Nickleby*”

In the preface to the first edition of *Nicholas Nickleby* as a book, and in another written later, Dickens makes it clear that the main purpose of the novel was to expose the atrocious state of things existing in the private schools of Yorkshire; and in fact, Mr Squeers and family and his down-trodden victim Smike come into the first chapter and the very last. Dickens investigated the scandal on the spot, and a scandal there undoubtedly was, which his exposure put an end to. But it is possible that the school which he showed up was by no means the worst, and that he hastily accepted the evidence of an individual with a private grudge of his own, and so ruined a man who did not quite deserve it.<sup>1</sup> In performing what he took to be a public duty, however, Dickens devised some scenes worthy of the author of *Roderick Random*, and summed them up in an epistle not surpassed by the most grotesque account of personal experiences in *Humphry Clinker*. Miss Squeers, whose tenderness for her father's usher had not been “reciprocal” by Nicholas, is more graphic even than the author in his circumstantial report of what took place in the schoolroom, when Nicholas turns on Mr Squeers:

“We are in a state of mind beyond everything, and my pa is one mask of brooses both blue and green likewise two forms are steeped in his Goar. . . . When your newew that you recommended for a teacher had done this to my pa and jumped upon his body with his feet and also langwedge which I will not pollewt my pen with describing, he assaulted my ma with dreadful violence, dashed her to the earth, and drove her back

<sup>1</sup> See Wright (124-127) on the unfortunate William Shaw and the school at Bowes, near Barnard Castle.

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comb several inches into her head. A very little more and it must have entered her skull. We have a medical certifiket that if it had, the tortershell would have affected the brain." With the significant postscript, "I pity his ignorance and despise him."

As to character in the leading personages, all there is to be said for Nicholas is that he is exactly like most of Dickens's other heroes; his sister Kate is one of the insipidly good, and their uncle, Ralph Nickleby, of the insipidly bad, the flinty-hearted and avaricious tyrant of popular melodrama. Their job is to work the theatrical machinery. And Ralph's blue-blooded friends, Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Frederick Verisopht, are lifeless caricatures transplanted from the transpontine stage, and daubed with an extra coat of paint which actually caricatures Dickens's more genuine grotesquerie. Another figment of stage romance is the good young lady, Madeline Bray, whose hand is to remunerate Nicholas, after she has effected her escape from a selfish father and the machinations of another aged usurer who moves heaven and hell to marry her.

Beside these monstrous concoctions or sheer nonentities stand a group of beings whose comic idiosyncrasies and essential truth represent Dickens at his most inimitable. Characteristically, their place in the fortunes and misfortunes of Nicholas Nickleby is only incidental and indirect: the plot might easily have dispensed with them and still have reached its preposterous conclusion, Squeers ending as a thief, and his victim, the wretched Smike, turning out to be the son of Ralph Nickleby. To say which is the most entertaining among them, to have to decide between a Mrs Nickleby and a Vincent Crummles, or a Newman Noggs and a Mantalini, would veritably be a choice of Herakles. Review them, rather, without daring a preference.

"It's a weakness in our family," said Mrs Nickleby, "so, of course, I can't be blamed for it. Your grandmama, Kate, was exactly the same—precisely. The least excitement, the slightest surprise—she fainted away directly. I have heard her

say, often and often, that when she was a young lady, and before she was married, she was turning a corner into Oxford-street one day, when she ran against her own hair-dresser, who, it seems, was escaping from a bear;—the mere suddenness of the encounter made her faint away, directly. Wait, though,” added Mrs Nickleby, pausing to consider. “Let me be sure I’m right. Was it her hair-dresser who had escaped from a bear, or was it a bear who had escaped from her hair-dresser’s? I declare I can’t remember just now, but the hair-dresser was a very handsome man, I know, and quite the gentleman in his manners; so that it has nothing to do with the point of the story.”

Mrs Nickleby having imperceptibly fallen into one of her retrospective moods, improved in temper from that moment, and glided, by an easy change of the conversation occasionally, into various other anecdotes, no less remarkable for their strict application to the subject in hand.

“She was very foolish, she knew,” Mrs Nickleby remarked of herself, with a feeble smile; but what excellent fooling, and what a pity she had not a more remarkable son! With her rambling and incoherent retrospections pouring forth in a mazy stream, she attains almost to the greatness of a myth, like Mrs Gamp and Mr Micawber. The love passages with the old man from the asylum are a peg for more of her absurdities, but are also one illustration among many how legitimately Dickens could disregard the critical injunction against bringing mad people on the comic stage. Then the burlesque of a harlequinade, which is by no means ended when the curtain rings down in the Portsmouth theatre, but turns into more whimsical farce, of Mr Vincent Crummles and the Infant Phenomenon, or “Infant humbug,” as the hypercritical Mr Folair pronounces her; the different brand of humour in the reduced gentleman, Mr Newman Noggs, and the byplay of jealous and spiteful Miss Knag, and the comedy of the Lillyvicks and the four Miss Kenwigses; with, best of all, the sheer sublimity of Mr Mantalini, that gigantic buffoon, the incredible made flesh, far too good to go to the “demnition bowwows,” where Dickens unmercifully sends him: these combine to make one of the finest galleries in all his works.

"Do not put itself out of humour," said Mr Mantalini breaking an egg. "It is a pretty, bewitching little demd countenance, and it should not be out of humour, for it spoils its loveliness, and makes it cross and gloomy like a frightful, naughty, demd hobgoblin."

"I am not to be brought round in that way, always," rejoined Madame, sulkily.

"It shall be brought round in any way it likes best, and not brought round at all if it likes that better," retorted Mr Mantalini, with his egg-spoon in his mouth.

"It's very easy to talk," said Mrs Mantalini.

"Not so easy when one is eating a demnition egg," replied Mr Mantalini, "for the yolk runs down the waistcoat, and yolk of egg does not match any waistcoat but a yellow waistcoat, demmit."

"You were flirting with her during the whole night," said Madame Mantalini, apparently desirous to lead the conversation back to the point from which it had strayed.

"No, no, my life."

"You were," said Madame; "I had my eye upon you all the time."

"Bless the little twinkling eye; was it on me all the time!" cried Mr Mantalini, in a sort of lazy rapture. "Oh, demmit!"

"And I say once more," resumed Madame, "that you ought not to waltz with anybody but your own wife; and I will not bear it, Mantalini, if I take poison first."

"She will not take poison and have horrid pains, will she?" said Mantalini; who, by the altered sound of his voice, seemed to have moved his chair, and taken up his position nearer to his wife. "She will not take poison, because she had a demd fine husband who might have married two countesses and a dowager——"

"Two countesses," interposed Madame. "You told me one before!"

"Two!" cried Mantalini. "Two demd fine women, real countesses and splendid fortunes, demmit."

"And why didn't you?" asked Madame, playfully.

"Why didn't I!" replied her husband. "Had I not seen, at a morning concert, the demdest little fascinator in all the world, and while that little fascinator is my wife, may not all the countesses and dowagers in England be——"

Mr Mantalini did not finish the sentence, but he gave

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Madame Mantalini a very loud kiss, which Madame Mantalini returned; after which, there seemed to be more kissing mixed up with the progress of the breakfast.

"And what about the cash, my existence's jewel?" said Mr Mantalini, when the endearments ceased. "How much have we in hand?"

The good Cheeryble brothers were drawn from a pair of charitable employers met in Manchester.<sup>1</sup> No doubt a great many of the choicest figures had a similar origin, among his regular or his chance acquaintance. Enough is known of Dickens's habit of noting down peculiarities, and consciously or unconsciously developing a handful of traits into a character, to assure us that the great majority of his creations, and these among the richest in the comedy of nature, had actual originals. The individual observed may have been only the germ, the datum-point for a flight of imaginative extravagance. But his comic genius required a fulcrum, a bit of solidity, something concrete which he could keep a grasp upon. Such material was more plentiful then than now. Yet it does not seem long since people still talked of having met "a character out of Dickens." Gissing, writing in 1898, observed in regard to this, "Sixty years ago, grotesques and eccentricities were more common than nowadays,"<sup>2</sup> and went on to explain how education had ground down all the oddities to a level, and the masses had been "drilled into uniformity." But much less than sixty years ago from the present date there were such beings still at large for those who had an eye for them, beings whose inborn absurdities would, if faithfully reproduced, be taken for caricature. Nor are they a race entirely extinct. If Dickens were alive to-day, he might bewail the ravages of progress; but he would probably find less of the human material gone for ever than of the other elements out of which he raised his huge and motley fabric.

"*Barnaby Rudge*"

His next novel, *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), is crowded with uncouth shapes. It is historical fiction, and thus an artificial genre for Dickens; which is the reason, no doubt, why it should harbour more than one monstrosity in the diversified

<sup>1</sup> See above, 249 n.

<sup>2</sup> *Charles Dickens*, 17.

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throng of characters. But it also has a plot, hingeing upon the mystery of a crime perpetrated a quarter of a century earlier, the sequel to which is, arbitrarily and with considerable detriment to the effect Dickens counted upon, intertwined with the sensational story of the Gordon Riots. The tale of the murder is retold in the first chapter, and a little later the murderer reappears, as if from the dead. He is, in fact, the father of Barnaby Rudge, who was born an idiot on the day following the crime, the poor mother having been the sole person in the secret of her husband's guilt. Rudge had put his own clothes on the corpse of another victim, whom he had thrown into a pond. And now the villain disappears again, only to reappear during the riots, five years later, and to perish on the gallows with some of the worst of the rioters. But Dickens, who cared nothing for the unities, was so sparing in handing out his clues, and the question of the murder and of the identity of the criminal has been whelmed in such terror-inspiring events, that the theatrical stroke of the scoundrel's capture on the scene of his crime and the vengeance that falls on him at last may easily escape an unwary reader. It cannot be said that he cleared up all the problems raised, even with this ample allowance of time to do it in.<sup>1</sup>

With his dual plot, combining two of the regular motives of Gothic romance, secret murder and public violence, a setting of the gloomily picturesque order was naturally called for, and Dickens rose to the occasion. He was in his element depicting the quaint old Maypole Inn, the wilderness of London streets, and the idyllic contrast of the quiet Temple and yet unravished Fountain Court. The hordes who march

<sup>1</sup> Edgar Allan Poe was more interested in the murder-plot, and was inclined to regard the drama of the riots as "*forcibly* introduced." He came to the conclusion, however, that the riots could not have been merely an afterthought, although "they have no necessary connexion with the story." But the result of merging the one theme in the other was "most unfavourable." "That which, of itself, would have proved highly effective, has been rendered nearly null by its situation. In the multitudinous outrage and horror of the Rebellion, the *one* atrocity is utterly whelmed and extinguished." Dickens shifted the main interest. "The reader's attention becomes absorbed in the riots, and he fails to observe that what should have been the true catastrophe of the novel is exceedingly feeble and ineffective" (*Works*, ed. R. H. Stothard, vi. 553-555). Poe, at any rate, brings out one thing clearly, the way Dickens fumbled with plots, and evolved melodramatic performers in them, when his genius was for something entirely different.

to Westminster, burn the Holborn mansion, and paralyse the Lord Mayor with apprehension, are as much part of the stage furniture as actors in the play; they are the human background, the gloomy underworld out of which the more strenuous and dangerous figures are thrown up, whilst uglier ones, such as Barnaby's detestable father, still lurk in the nether darkness. Barnaby's disordered brain and Barnaby's raven strike at the beginning the note of frenzy which is keyed to this outbreak of Bedlamite fanaticism. The malevolent and hypocritical Gashford,<sup>1</sup> the sinister blind man Stagg, that ghoulisjester, Dennis the hangman, and Barnaby's truculent friend, Hugh the ostler, take the foremost place with Lord George Gordon among the demented insurgents. This last-named, a weak and ill-balanced personage, whom his enemies in Parliament branded as a madman with the rest, Dickens treats forbearingly, perhaps out of unreasoning sympathy with a supposed friend of the people. On the other hand, hatred for an enemy of the people was responsible for Sir John Chester, an inept caricature of his half-namesake, the famous Lord Chesterfield, who not merely belonged to an order of minds that Dickens was unable to comprehend, but was the negation of everything that Dickens cherished, in other words, was his Satan. This utter missfire at a semi-historical mark repays comparison with his successes in a line that goes far beyond realism: there is such an abysmal difference between the most daring imagination that hits something and the careful aim which misses by a good deal less than a mile.

*Dickens  
and  
Scott*

Dickens could not but have had *The Heart of Midlothian* in mind in writing *Barnaby Rudge*. The historical events are manipulated, and, indeed, exaggerated, so as to vie in grim and lurid effects with the Porteous riots, and are integrated into the story as nearly as possible in the same way. Nor did Dickens forget the sinister part in the earlier novel played by the crazy Madge Wildfire. He had read up his history, and he knew the ground as well as Scott knew Old Edinburgh.

<sup>1</sup> Ward (46) says that Gashford "has no historical original"; but Lang identified him with Dr Robert Watson, the adventurer, and biographer of Lord George (Notes to Gadshill ed. of *Barnaby Rudge*, i. 428).

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He may have been guilty of over-emphasis and occasional over-strain; he did not commit any more serious inaccuracy. Scott had seemed able to supplement the historical personages with an unlimited supply of supernumeraries, as real and lifelike as they. Dickens set in motion a crowd equally numerous, equally various, yet stamped for the most part with something misshapen and baleful that smacks of the Radcliffian laboratory or of the melodramatic stage, or else of his own unique brand of grotesque humour. The Vardens, the Willets, Miss Miggs, and Sim Tappertit are not among his most memorable creations; but they are his own enough to be inimitable and perhaps unanalysable. Dolly Varden is a minx. Dickens admits that she is "a coquette by nature, and a spoiled child"; but she has captivated many besides Joe Willet. And little Mr Simon Tappertit, with his "majestic shadowy ideas," his "ambitious and aspiring soul," chafing, fretting, and fermenting "within that precious cask, his body," gets rather less than his literary deserts in losing both his legs as a consequence of aspiring to be a leader of the rebels.

It was unfortunate that Dickens encumbered himself with "the framework of "Master Humphrey's Clock" as an elegant introduction to *Barnaby Rudge* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841); it clogs this second of the pair of stories, which came first in serial issue, by overlapping into the picture. Apart from this, the desultory opening is not inappropriate to a rambling tale with no particular object but to furnish scope for Little Nell and her grandsire, Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness, Codlin and Short and Mrs Jarley, with their itinerant shows, Cheggs and Chuckster and amiable Kit Nubbles, and that monstrous trio, Sally Brass and her brother and the hideous dwarf Quilp, to display their humours, their pathos, or their ferocity. But these treasures of observation and of creative fantasy were meant only for a secondary place in the pathetic story of Nell. The devotion of this saintly and sainted child to her selfish old grandfather was the kind of idyllic motive that appealed irresistibly to Victorian sentiment, and all this was imitated, as already remarked, by



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Bulwer-Lytton in *What will he do with It?*<sup>1</sup> But this is not what a saner perception has recognized as worthiest of enjoyment and worthiest of praise. Dickens made his usual mistake: his protagonists are not the people that interest; rather is it the secondary characters who sooner or later push themselves to the front by intrinsic force of personality. *The Old Curiosity Shop* contains a whole galaxy of those creations in which comic or poetic fantasy goes beyond mere fidelity to nature, without overstraining nature. There are lesser as well as greater examples. Dickens may well have met with individuals as racy as the Punch and Judy men or Mrs Jarley, the peripatetic Madame Tussaud, "The genuine and only Jarley," "the delight of the nobility and gentry," who makes the profound observation: "I won't go so far as to say that, as it is, I've seen wax-work quite like life, but I've certainly seen some life that was exactly like wax-work." Codlin and Short, at any rate, have been identified with the Willis and Tubby whom Dickens and Mark Lemon came across at Englefield Green<sup>2</sup>; and he had probably met at least one original for Jerry and his performing dogs. Counterparts for Cheggs and Chuckster, or the good-natured boy Kit Nubbles, were no great rarities in the vast population of Londoners whom Dickens regarded as his bosom friends. He loved them so much that he would never be content to regard a single one as a colourless unit. None is a nonentity; each is given that little touch by which they can always be singled out in the crowd.

Figures  
trans-  
cending  
common  
reality

But there are four or five who stand in a higher category. The germ of fact has undergone, nothing so gross as caricature, but a process of transfiguration. Hence such a glorified pair as Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness, and on the other hand that monstrous trio, Sampson Brass and the "female dragon," his sister Sally, and their confederate, Quilp, an incarnation of moral ugliness in a shape that fits it. The doings of the three conspirators are invested with enough grotesque humour

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 200. As Mr Bernard Darwin reminds us, it was Little Nell that made *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

<sup>2</sup> Wright, 138-139. See also p. 137 for the probability that Little Nell was the apotheosis of Mary Hogarth, Dickens's idolized sister-in-law, who died in 1837.

to save them from utter repulsiveness; but their end is an appropriate solution of the gruesome comedy, and Quilp goes back to his own element when the cold, dark water drags him down under the slimy piles of the river-bank. Quilp is no mere villain transplanted from Gothic romance; he is a demon, revelling in mischief, and quaffing fiery liquor that scalds Sampson's gullet and throws him into a swoon. When the wretched pettifogger comes round—

Mr Brass's first impression was, that his host was gone and had left him there alone—perhaps locked him in for the night. A strong smell of tobacco, however, suggested a new train of ideas; he looked upward, and saw that the dwarf was smoking in his hammock.

"Good-bye, sir," cried Brass, faintly. "Good-bye, sir."

"Won't you stop all night?" said the dwarf, peeping out. "Do stop all night!"

"I couldn't, indeed, sir," replied Brass, who was almost dead from nausea and the closeness of the room. "If you'd have the goodness to show me a light, so that I may see my way across the yard, sir——"

Quilp was out in an instant; not with his legs first, or his head first, or his arms first, but bodily—altogether.

"To be sure," he said, taking up a lantern, which was now the only light in the place. "Be careful how you go, my dear friend. Be sure to pick your way among the timber, for all the rusty nails are upwards. There's a dog in the lane. He bit a man last night, and a woman the night before, and last Tuesday he killed a child—but that was in play. Don't go too near him."

Brass staggers out of the dwarf's infernal lair, with many a stumble and paroxysm of terror, to which the malicious creature listens "in a rapture of delight," as he goes back to his hammock.

The knavish, tender, swaggering knight-errant, Dick *Dick* Swiveller, with the damsel whom he rescues from bondage *Swiveller* and ill-usage, was begotten of the same lyrical imagination as "The Christmas Carol" and "The Chimes." If Dickens tried to write verse, he produced doggerel. The effect of excitement in his most elevated passages is a prose that can

be scanned as a sort of verse, or a detestable sing-song which is neither verse nor prose. Mrs Gamp's sublimities slide spontaneously into metre; Dick Swiveller's transports require the additional embellishment of rhyme.

"Miss Wackles, I believed you true, and I was blest in so believing, but now I mourn that e'er I knew a girl so fair and so deceiving."

Miss Sophy bit her lip, and affected to look with great interest after Mr Cheggs, who was quaffing lemonade in the distance.

"I came here," said Dick, rather oblivious of the purpose with which he had really come, "with my bosom expanded, my heart dilated, and my sentiments of a corresponding description. I go away with feelings that may be conceived, but cannot be described: feeling within myself the desolating truth that my best affections have experienced, this night, a stifler!"

"I am sure I don't know what you mean, Mr Swiveller," said Miss Sophy, with downcast eyes. "I'm very sorry if——"

"Sorry, ma'am!" said Dick, "sorry in the possession of a Cheggs!"

But Dick attains his real sublimity when, "assuming the gay and fashionable air which such society required," he entertains the poor little Marchioness, observing on the expediency of withdrawing before Mr Sampson and Miss Sally Brass return.

"With which object in view, Marchioness," said Mr Swiveller, gravely, "I shall ask your ladyship's permission to put the board in my pocket, and to retire from the presence when I have finished this tankard; merely observing, Marchioness, that since life like a river is flowing, I care not how fast it rolls on, ma'am, on, while such purl on the bank still is growing, and such eyes light the waves as they run. Marchioness, your health. You will excuse my wearing my hat, but the palace is damp, and the marble floor is—if I may be allowed the expression—sloppy. . . .

"The Baron Sampsono Brasso and his fair sister are (you tell me) at the Play?" said Mr Swiveller, leaning his left arm heavily upon the table, and raising his voice and his right leg after the manner of a theatrical bandit.

The Marchioness nodded.

"Ha!" said Mr Swiveller, with a portentous frown. "'Tis

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well, Marchioness!—but no matter. Some wine there. Ho!" He illustrated these melodramatic morsels by handing the tankard to himself with great humility, receiving it haughtily, drinking from it thirstily, and smacking his lips fiercely.

On returning from his first visit to America, Dickens "*Ameri-* published his *American Notes* (1842), an unadorned record, <sup>can</sup> distinguished from innumerable others only as the observations <sup>Notes</sup> of a person of uncommon sensibility. As such, it might have <sup>and</sup> been a classic, had it not been eclipsed by the very different <sup>mas</sup> account of a sojourn in the United States in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. *Books*" Dickens saw many sights that affected him profoundly; but the most moving description in *American Notes* is that of the Philadelphia gaol where the prisoners were kept in absolute solitude. He muses over the inmates and imagines a story for each—the arrival at the place of confinement, the shock of despair, the wonder whether there are other captives, what they are like, their feelings, their fears, dreams, agonies, morbid fancies, the terrible death in life. "It is my fixed opinion," writes the social reformer, "that those who have undergone this punishment, must pass into society again morally unhealthy and diseased." The social reformer is to the fore also in the five fairy-tales written for Christmas (1843–1848), afterwards collected as *Christmas Books*. They go with *The Old Curiosity Shop*, as containing more of the poetry of Dickens than the prose. Christmas to him was the great festival of good-will. It had had its niche in *Sketches by Boz*, and in the scenes of revelry at Dingley Dell, in *Pickwick*. All the tales in *Christmas Books* are apologues. Says the ghost who converts the tight-fisted Scrooge to benevolence, in the "Carol":

"It is required of every man, that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world—oh, woe is me!—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness."

Dickens was hard at work on *Martin Chuzzlewit* when he wrote this; a year later he penned "The Chimes," at Genoa. This is not a mere apologue, it is a satire, on his pet aversion, the

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Big-wigs and the cant of political economy. Alderman Cute, the cold-blooded preacher of economic doctrine to the penniless, was drawn from a certain Sir Peter Laurie; and probably Sir Joseph Bowley and Mr Filer were also faithful portraits.<sup>1</sup> To the latter, people are mere statistics.

The gentleman, not otherwise hard-hearted or indifferent to such scenes, than that he saw them every day, and knew that they were figures of no moment in the Filer sums—mere scratches in the working of those calculations—laid his hand upon the heart that beat no more, and listened for the breath, and said, "His pain is over. It's better as it is!"

Tenderness is the lesson of the third story, as of the first, with its instantaneous reformation of Scrooge, who showers blessings and turkey on poor Bob Cratchit. A pretty idea this, of the chirping Cricket, the "Genius of his Hearth and Home," who "came out, in fairy shape, into the room, and summoned many forms of Home about him. Dots of all ages, and all sizes, filled the chamber." And Dickens, the lover of children, conjures up long processions of Dots, who cheer the heart of the sturdy carrier, so that it "grew light and happy, and he thanked his Household God with all his might, and cared no more for Gruff and Tackleton than you do." But the tenderest picture is of the Blind Girl and old Caleb, who counterfeits the light step and the vigour of youth, to delude his child into the belief that they are thriving and happy, and not at the mercy of the two sweaters, Gruff and Tackleton.

Never had he, when his heart was heaviest, forgotten the light tread that was to render hers so cheerful and courageous. . . . The Blind Girl never knew that ugly shapes of delf and earthenware were on the board; that sorrow and faintheartedness were in the house; that Caleb's scanty hairs were turning greyer and more grey, before her sightless face.

Compared with this, "The Battle of Life" is only a literary exercise, mannered, and stiff with laboured elegance. It is about two charming sisters, one of whom on the eve of marriage makes believe to run off with another man, renouncing him

<sup>1</sup> Introduction, by Charles Dickens the Younger.

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that she loves to the sister who loves him more. It is one of his many tales of "the great endurance cheerfully sustained," which Dickens thought most seasonable at Christmas. "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain" escapes the reproach of stiltedness only by the incidental sketches of Milly and the Tetterbys, who are better, if possible, than the Cratchits. A disheartened man is allowed to forget the wrongs and sorrows which have made memory a curse, but on the ominous condition that all who come in contact with him shall likewise be released from the remembrances that sadden their lives. But, alas! with the banished recollections what chain of feelings and associations is intertwined! The haunted man carries desolation wherever he goes, and he is overjoyed when the delusive bargain is cancelled.

On the principle of "cut and come again," Dickens had "*Martin* published his *American Notes*, which were inoffensive if sparing *Chuzzlewit*" of compliment, and then began meditating a full-length novel to exploit his American experiences to the full. It was almost inevitable that in a novel based upon observations so brief and rapid the shams and absurdities should bulk larger even than life-size. A hasty view is a provocation to caricature, independently of the many annoyances and disappointments which Dickens actually suffered. He would have had to spend years instead of weeks in this extraordinary land, to have discovered the hidden virtues which long and close experience had revealed to the novelist in his home country.<sup>1</sup> It could have been prophesied that when Charles Dickens put the Americans into fiction he would lay himself open to the charge of libel. *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a huge medley of all his own brands of comedy, from farce to purest humour, interspersed with melodrama that all but reaches the level of tragedy; a medley in which the American chapters form such a contrast to those dealing with Martin's life in England that there is no comparing them, in the lack of common standards of measurement. Some of

<sup>1</sup> Forster has some sensible remarks on the manner, even in his letters home, "Everything of an objectionable kind, whether the author would have had it so or not, stands out more prominently and distinctly than matter of the opposite description. The social sin is a more tangible thing than the social virtue." To insist on the charities and graces is almost to outrage their quiet unobtrusiveness (i. 234-235).

Dickens's most daring creations appear in the English chapters, and some that are astonishing though not of the same order in the American scenes; but Mark Tapley is the only one of note who plays a part in both countries, for that the hero is of minor interest as a character goes without saying in a novel by Dickens. Mr Pecksniff and Mrs Gamp belong to the English section, along with Tom Pinch, Mr Mould, Mrs Todgers, and a whole row of admirable grotesques. Their opposites on the American side are Mr Jefferson Brick, Mrs Hominy, the Hon. Elijah Pogram, Mr Zephaniah Scadder, Colonel Diver, editor of the *New York Rowdy Journal*, and several others hardly less remarkable. It is great good fortune to have between the covers of one book examples of what is flagrant and unmistakable caricature, and also examples of that for which caricature does not seem a fitting description, so completely does it transcend common experience, however much its truth to human nature may be intuitively recognized. Caricature is the art that works through exaggeration, exaggeration of select features and idiosyncrasies.<sup>1</sup> The process is almost arithmetical. It requires insight and humour, but then only simple addition and the multiplication table. But this would not beget a Pecksniff or a Mrs Gamp. Call them extravagances, colossal grotesques, sublimations of eccentricities, call them what you will: it is obvious that something more imaginative, more creative, went to their making than the keen eye and technical dexterity of the caricaturist. True, Dickens loved Mrs Gamp, and it is not too much to say that he treasured Mr Pecksniff as a jewel of the purest water. And he detested the Americans, at least those blatant and aggressive types which he singled out for mockery in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. He knew from of old his Gamps and Pecksniffs, his Moulds and Todgerses, and their like; whereas he had only recently made the unpleasant acquaintance of Mr Jefferson Brick and Mrs Hominy; and all he could do for such people was to hit

<sup>1</sup> Chesterton puts it roundly, "Exaggeration is the definition of art" (*Charles Dickens*, 18). Dickens was not well served by his illustrators, who acted upon some such maxim, and turned the Wellers, Mr Mantalini, Mrs Gamp, and other ineffable beings into sheer goliwogs. There were exceptions—e.g. Leech, whose illustrations Dickens liked because "he turned caricature into character" (Forster, ii. 159). And Cruikshank rose well to the occasion in *Sketches by Boz*.

off impatiently their more glaring absurdities. His off-hand contempt was more galling, however, than more elaborate satire. Perhaps this accounts for all the difference between those fools of his who do not rise above the level of farce and pantomime and the creations which are universally hailed as pure Dickens.

For there seem to be at least three fairly distinguishable *Different* grades into which his characters may be assorted, all of them well represented in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The highest are those *orders* live creations which may perchance have had their germs in *in his* oddities whom he had actually known, but were developed and transfigured into something richer and more strange. In some, a predominant trait or mannerism is carried to the very limits of the grotesque; others are more complex, more exuberant. They range from the richest and boldest, the Pickwicks and Wellers, the Gamps and Pecksniffs, Dick Swiveller and Quilp, Mr Micawber and Betsey Trotwood, Mr Mantalini and Joe Gargery, to the Mark Tapleys, Chuffeys, Montague Tiggs, Wemmicks, Crummleses, Kenwidges, and countless others, their equals at any rate in one thing, the unlikeness of each to every other individual in the motley crowd. An odd one here and there may perhaps not ring true; Chevy Slyme, for instance, here, and Rosa Dartle, in *David Copperfield*. Perhaps in some cases Dickens had not quite got the rights of them, or he may have tried at an amalgam which fused badly, or, again, he may have done violence to a character out of mere inadvertence and forgetfulness of his original idea. He was always changing his mind, tampering with his plots, and starting in new directions that put a strain on characterization which was sound to begin with. Tom Pinch, however, in the present novel, is overdone from sentimental and moralistic motives rather than to satisfy the exigencies of plot.

The caricatures form a distinct and inferior class, magnificent as in effect most of them are. They were drawn from originals who inspired, not affection, but scorn and dislike, or whom he knew superficially and did not want to know better. Such were these preposterous Americans, and the burlesque aldermen



The  
carica-  
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in "The Chimes"; such were a good many of his egregious big-wigs. As to Boythorn and Skimpole, in *Bleak House*, they are not caricatures in the proper sense of the word, but tolerably faithful portraits of his friends, Landor and Leigh Hunt, utilized by Dickens, very reprehensibly, to save himself the trouble of providing handiwork of his own. Skimpole was such an abstract of the comic side of Leigh Hunt that it approximated to caricature, and so was received.<sup>1</sup> In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, however, as in most of his novels, melodrama works the plot, and the personnel directly employed on the job are the usual lay figures of melodramatic fiction, no more characteristic of Dickens than of anyone else in the trade. In his more didactic stories the same conventional good people or bad make their appearance. They are not characters, they have no personality; anything or anybody will do to point a moral, however little they may adorn the tale. It is no exaggeration to say of Dickens, who ushered into the world of fancy a greater and more diversified host than any other novelist, that he also produced and employed on what may be called routine duties a larger number of beings that have no being, mere lifeless bits of the mechanism. And yet these nonentities probably cost him more pains than the live people, because he had to contrive them out of his own head to carry out their appointed labours. *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a study of ruthless and sordid selfishness; and in the grand impersonation of that vice, impelling to crime, Dickens conjures up a baleful and terror-inspiring figure. But Jonas Chuzzlewit remains only a figure, an embodiment of evil, not a conscious human spirit subject to all the normal weaknesses of the flesh. Old Martin Chuzzlewit, his father, is simply the parent of such a reprobate, despite the theatrical touches put in to make him look real. And young Martin is the duplicate of any respectable young fellow doing duty as hero in a novel. The best that can be said of such is that they behave consistently, and at times impressively, in the parts assigned them. Some of the characters of Dickens, however, are not so easily classified; there are some who come betwixt and

<sup>1</sup> This lapse of Dickens is very fairly discussed by Ward (117-122).

between. The line is often vague between caricature and the far more than caricature; even the performers in the melodrama are by no means barren of attributes much higher than melodrama, witness Bill Sikes and Fagin, in *Oliver Twist*, or the gruesome comedy in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and the baffled villainies of the monstrous Quilp and his odd pair of confederates. Surely, the fairest test whether this or that is caricature is to ask, what is it a caricature of? It is a test that usually works, although with Dickens it is far from implying that everything for which there was an original must therefore be caricature. Only to ask it of Pecksniff or Chadband, Mr Mantalini or Mrs Gamp, or any of the greater comic creations, is to see what was his real achievement. In a sense, all of them are drawn from life. But observation was only the starting-point; perhaps a glance, perhaps a few syllables, was enough: the rest is Dickens and his comic vision, rejoicing in the wildest absurdities of which human nature can be imagined capable.

His method, either in caricature or in free imaginative *The* delineation, after he had set the stage and sketched those *characters* upon it in a few swift, perhaps virulent, strokes, was to let the characters depict themselves—in short, to let them speak. *depict them-selves* Whatever may be said, rightly or wrongly, against his style, in his dialogue, at any rate, Dickens shows himself a great artist in words.

“Miss Toppit, and Miss Codger!” said Mrs Hominy.

“Codger’s the lady so often mentioned in the English newspapers, I should think, sir,” whispered Mark. “The oldest inhabitant as never remembers anything.”

“To be presented to a Pogram,” said Miss Codger, “by a Hominy, indeed, a thrilling moment is it in its impressiveness on what we call our feelings. But why we call them so, or why impressed they are, or if impressed they are at all, or if at all we are, or if there really is, oh gasping one! a Pogram or a Hominy, or any active principle to which we give those titles, is a topic, Spirit searching, light abandoned, much too vast to enter on, at this unlooked-for crisis.”

“Mind and matter,” said the lady in the wig, “glide swift into the vortex of immensity. Howls the sublime, and softly

sleeps the calm Ideal, in the whispering chambers of Imagination. To hear it, sweet it is. But then, outlaughs the stern philosopher, and saith to the Grotesque, 'What ho! arrest for me that Agency. Go, bring it here!' And so the vision fadeth."

One does not ask if that is true to nature, "if there really is, oh gasping one!" such a thing as nature; nor does one ask it of Chevy Slyme.

"I'll let 'em know, and I'll let all men know," cried Chevy Slyme, "that I'm none of the mean, grovelling, tame characters they meet with commonly. I have an independent spirit. I have a heart that swells in my bosom. I have a soul that rises superior to base considerations."

"Oh Chiv, Chiv," murmured Mr Tigg. "You have a nobly independent nature, Chiv!"

"You go and do your duty, sir," said Mr Slyme, angrily, "and borrow money for travelling expenses; and whoever you borrow it of, let 'em know that I possess a haughty spirit, and a proud spirit, and have infernally finely-touched chords in my nature, which won't brook patronage. Do you hear? Tell 'em I hate 'em, and that that's the way I preserve my self-respect; and tell 'em that no man ever respected himself more than I do!"

It is superlative nonsense, though it may carry no conviction, and the speakers may seem myths of a perishable order compared with Mrs Gamp. But the sublimer creation asserts her immortality in precisely the same way. And, as of all great poetic creations, her utterances are in a rhythm always her own. "What do you want to speak to me about, Mrs Gamp?" asks Mr Mould, the worthy undertaker of funereal pomps.

"Jest this, sir," Mrs Gamp returned, "with thanks to you for asking. There *is* a gent, sir, at the Bull in Holborn, as has been took ill there, and is bad abed. They have a day nurse as was recommended from Bartholomew's; and well I knows her, Mr Mould, her name bein' Mrs Prig, the best of creeturs. But she is otherways engaged at night, and they are in wants of night-watching; consequent she says to them, having reposed the greatest friendliness in me for twenty year, 'The soberest

person going, and the best of blessings in a sick room, is Mrs Gamp. Send a boy to Kingsgate Street,' she says, 'and snap her up at any price, for Mrs Gamp is worth her weight and more in goldian guineas.' My landlord brings the message down to me, and says, 'bein' in a light place where you are, and this job promising so well, why not unite the two?' 'No, sir,' I says, 'not unbeknown to Mr Mould, and therefore do not think it. But I will go to Mr Mould,' I says, 'and ast him, if you like.'"

This is her prose; but her loftier descants and her aphorisms are in all the anthologies, aphorisms as old as mankind, but given new pith and freshness by her instinctive emendations.

"Rich folk may ride on camels, but it ain't so easy for 'em to see out of a needle's eye."

"I says to Mrs Harris," Mrs Gamp continued, "only t'other day, the last Monday as ever dawned upon this Piljian's Projiss of a mortal wale; I says to Mrs Harris, when she says to me, 'Years and our trials, Mrs Gamp, sets marks upon us all,' 'Say not the words, Mrs Harris, if you and me is to be continual friends, for sech is not the case.'"

Mr Pecksniff, Mr Tigg, Mr Moddle, inditer of the inimitable letter of farewell to the wronged Miss Pecksniff, and, of course, all the highfalutin, platitudinous Yankees, have their individual style of allocution. Mark Tapley's everlasting catchword, "Jolly," has made himself a catchword.

The book was put together from hand to mouth; it is a *Clumsy* monument of haphazard composition, from the first chapter *construction* to the flight of Mr Moddle at the end. That very first chapter, which has upset many worthy readers, was a misguided attempt to imitate the genealogical introduction to *Jonathan Wild*.<sup>1</sup> Dickens could not or would not appreciate Fielding's sardonic badinage, and this strained effort simply shows how dangerous it was for him to meddle with irony. More seriously, he made a bad miscalculation over his villain, his anti-hero; Jonas is not a Quilp, and his tragic progress degenerates into rampageous melodrama.<sup>2</sup> Complicated further

<sup>1</sup> See Volume IV. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Dickens had himself seen Thomas Griffiths Wainewright (1794-1852), the art-critic, forger, and poisoner, of whom there is a grim account in Oscar Wilde's "Pen, Pencil, and Poison" (in *Intentions*); and he probably drew from him some traits

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with the absurd machinations of Mr Pecksniff, all this leads to the usual confusion and obfuscation; the events get themselves entangled in knots that are never properly untied. Nevertheless, the entertainment does not flag. The quarrel of Mrs Gamp and Betsey Prig, and the great theatrical scenes, the dinner at Mrs Todgers's and old Martin's spectacular vengeance, focus attention again, and the reader gladly forgets all his bewilderments. The plot may be cumbrous, the story may stagger and twist and run wide of the mark; but the climaxes have irresistible go.

of Jonas Chuzzlewit, of Slinkton, in "Hunted Down," and possibly of others (see J. W. T. Ley's ed. of Forster, 137, and Wright, 122).

## CHAPTER VI

### DICKENS

#### II. NOVELS OF PLOT

DICKENS was as well aware as anyone of his besetting sin, "*Dombey* clumsiness and carelessness in spinning his plots; and he and Son" exerted himself to give shape and coherence to his next big work, which he entitled with a flourish, *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son, Wholesale, Retail, and for Exportation* (1848). He took pains to give his leading characters the manners and bearing of a superior class, as exclusive in its own way as any other aristocracy. Mr Dombey, the wealthy London merchant, is of the same high standing as the elder Osborne, in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, a novel which came out the same year; the two are not unlike each other in their pride and arrogance. In his preface, Dickens lets fall a noticeable remark, on the difficulty and rarity of "the faculty (or the habit) of correctly observing the characters of men," meaning, of course, also their manners. It was a new social setting for him; but neither the members of the Dombey circle and their toadies nor the folk below stairs do any discredit to their station, though some of the most lifelike and the least concerned in the tragic misfortunes of the family have a liberal allowance of foibles and eccentricities. *Martin Chuzzlewit* was supposed to be a commentary on avarice; so here there is a central theme—pride and its nemesis, expounded in the history of Dombey's greatness and his fall. The heterogeneous crowd and their doings, mostly comic, seem to come in at haphazard, though, actually, the connexions are worked out with unwonted care and forethought. A tidier and a fairly coherent structure is the result, the only weakness being the superficial and fallible handling of motive. One thing the plot does ensure, at some cost to probability

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—namely, that everyone of the least importance does get his or her exact deserts, even if justice is executed by extraneous means—transportations for life, executions, accidental deaths, and a batch of incongruous weddings. Of the inner consistency of serious tragedy there is little. But the more painstaking workmanship does mark a turning-point in Dickens. He was not going to discard his farce and his humour. If a Captain Cuttle or a Captain Bunsby, a Cousin Feenix, a Toots, or a Susan Nipper, occurred to his imagination, he pursued the quarry as of old, to the verge of the incredible and beyond. But from now onwards he did pay more and more attention to his plots, not seldom to the detriment of much that was finer and more spontaneous; and he not only set himself industriously to paint the manners of social circles with which he had formerly had little commerce, but also to deal with such acute problems of personal relations as this of Mr Dombey and his daughter, self-conceit and indifference gradually but surely changing to jealousy and then developing into hatred. His original plan is extant in a letter to Forster.<sup>1</sup> Mr Dombey's pride was to receive the first shattering blow in the death of his son, little Paul, which demolishes "all his father's schemes and cherished hopes." Then, when he remembers how the boy turned always to his sister, and "had his arm round her neck when he was dying, and whispered to her, and would take things only from her hand, and never thought of him," "this feeling of indifference and uneasiness towards his daughter" was to turn "into positive hatred." Howbeit, the rejected daughter was "to come out better than any son at last," and after his ruin would be his only staff and treasure. But the mixture of motives in the father's dislike of Florence, and the relations between them which eventually lead to her flight, put too great a strain on Dickens.<sup>2</sup> This was not his element. He was uncertain and halting when he

<sup>1</sup> Taine chose *Dombey and Son* as a typical specimen of Dickens's inability to pursue a tragic theme to its logical conclusion. Dombey has driven his daughter to flight, and, his wife gone, his affairs in disorder, and himself the prey of public derision, he is on the brink of suicide, when Florence returns. "Elle le supplie; il s'attendrit; elle l'emmène; il devient le meilleur des pères, et gâte un beau roman" (*Hist. de la Litt. anglaise*—v. "Les Contemporains").

<sup>2</sup> Forster, ii. 21-23.

touched the inner springs of character. He plunges into false assumptions and subterfuges; and presently, with Mr Dombey's second wife, Edith, and with Mr Carker and his melodramatic teeth, he is in the region of the footlights again, not of the real world.

His contemporaries were melted to ecstasies of tears by the fate of little Paul. But a disillusioned generation, whilst admitting the sincerity of all this, and acknowledging that there is no false note,<sup>1</sup> turns away from such elaborate staging of life's inevitable sadness, to the humours which come in upon what he meant to be a lower plane. Some are caricatures, or very near it; but the two salt-water captains, Cuttle and Bunsby, if caricatures, are in the style of Smollett's grotesques, or what is better, Smollett crossed with Dickens.

"Here is a man," says the former, addressing himself to his fair auditors, and indicating the commander with his outstretched hook, "that has fell down more than any man alive; that has had more accidents happen to his own self than the Seamen's Hospital to all hands; that took as many spars and bars and bolts about the outside of his head when he was young, as you'd want a order on a Chatham-yard to build a pleasure-yacht with; and yet that got his opinions in that way, it's my belief, for there ain't nothing like 'em afloat or ashore."

Both these stout mariners quail before the more than masculine Mrs MacStinger, who is as real as her hard broom, with which and her buckets of water she puts Captain Cuttle to ignominious flight. "Lord love you, Wal'r!" said the Captain, "you've only seen her in a calm! But see her when her angry passions rise—and make a note on!" After the funeral baked meats, it is good comic relief to look on at the wedding procession and the redoubtable widow carrying off Bunsby in triumph, and overhear the dialogue between the sympathizing Captain Cuttle and his discomfited mate:

While the Reverend Melchisedech was offering up some extemporary orisons, the Captain found an opportunity of growling in the bridegroom's ear:

"What cheer, my lad, what cheer?"

<sup>1</sup> Wright (188-189) points out that little Paul's original was Harry Burnett, his sister's little deformed child, whose death afflicted Dickens sorely.



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To which Bunsby replied, with a forgetfulness of the Reverend Melchisedech, which nothing but his desperate circumstances could have excused:

"D——d bad."

"Jack Bunsby," whispered the Captain, "do you do this o' your own free will?"

Mr Bunsby answered "No."

"Why do you do it, then, my lad?" inquired the Captain, not unnaturally.

Bunsby, still looking, and always looking with an immovable countenance, at the opposite side of the world, made no reply.

"Why not sheer off?" said the Captain.

"Eh?" whispered Bunsby, with a momentary gleam of hope.

"Sheer off," said the Captain.

"Where's the good?" retorted the forlorn sage. "She'd capter me agen."

"Try!" replied the Captain. "Cheer up! Come! Now's your time. Sheer off, Jack Bunsby!"

Jack Bunsby, however, instead of profiting by the advice, said in a doleful whisper:

"It all began in that there chest o' yourn. Why did I ever conwoy her into port that night?"

"My lad," faltered the Captain, "I thought as you had come over her; not as she had come over you. A man as has got such opinions as you have!"

Mr Bunsby merely uttered a suppressed groan.

"Come!" said the Captain, nudging him with his elbow, "now's your time! Sheer off! I'll cover your retreat. The time's a-flying. Bunsby! It's for liberty. Will you once?"

Bunsby was immovable.

"Bunsby!" whispered the Captain, "will you twice?"

Bunsby wouldn't twice.

"Bunsby!" urged the Captain, "it's for liberty; will you three times? Now or never!"

Bunsby didn't then, and didn't ever; for Mrs MacStinger immediately afterwards married him.

The highly superior Mrs Skewton is caricature of a different sort, a literal portrait, bit in with acid and aversion; whilst that capable young woman, Susan Nipper, genteel Cousin Feenix, Miss Tox, and the lovable Toots show the various colours and degrees of Dickens's fantasy; they are admirable freaks of

human nature. Not freakish at all, yet almost as amusing and fully as ingratiating is Toodles, with his whole family, except the scapegrace, Rob the Grinder. And, on the score of humour, it is hard to choose between Dr Blimber's academy and the establishment of Mrs Pipchin, which, Miss Tox says, "with peculiar sweetness," she might distinguish from a mere preparatory school, "if I designated it an infantine Boarding-House of a very select description."

(1 Both critical and popular opinion are at one in voting *David Copperfield* (1850) their favourite among the novels of Dickens. First of all, it happens to be in large part his autobiography; and even the reader who is unaware of this feels the warmth and movement and buoyancy which Dickens, in his maturity, put into reminiscences which he loved to dwell and ponder on—and, not unnaturally, to idealize and embroider, for it is his life as he would fain have reconstructed it, not exactly the life of fact. There is a plot in *David Copperfield*, and some of the largest episodes are as theatrical as any he ever devised. That plot, in truth, often reminds one of the loose, ill-fitting suit which David had to put on when he arrived, barefoot and in rags, at his Aunt Betsey's. But the plot business is so detachable from the story of David, it interferes so little in retrospect with the more interesting context, that the tale runs in our memory more limpidly and unimpeded than that in any other of Dickens's novels. It is a tale of ups and downs, joys and sorrows; but the prevailing tone is one of cheerfulness and confidence in the essential goodness of life. And, though it is not entirely free from the ensnaring device of poetic justice, a form of preaching, and a misleading one, since it does not agree with ascertained facts, this is not one of his didactic stories. On the contrary, except for the exposure of Uriah Heep, a few reformations of sinners, and the lurid tragedy of Steerforth, all of which are extraneous to the history of David, this is tolerably free from both moralism and melodrama. Dickens had some inkling of the great truth that virtue is its own reward, and ought to be a sufficient reward; else he would not have been so simple and yet so moving in the speech put in the mouth of Betsey Trotwood:

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"Never," said my aunt, "be mean in anything; never be false; never be cruel. Avoid those three vices, Trot, and I can always be hopeful of you."

It is the beauty and desirableness of courage and unselfishness that count, or ought to count, in a novel. A reader may forget whether David Copperfield or anyone else in the book gets in the end his proper recompense; but no one will ever forget the sterling goodness of Peggotty and Mrs Betsey Trotwood, or the spirit of brotherliness and loyalty that sheds such brightness and harmony over the whole picture. ¶

*Dickens's realism* Nowhere else, moreover, does Dickens appear so true a realist. Often, from *Oliver Twist* to the darker scenes of squalor and depravity in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and of hatred, cupidity, and crime in *Dombey and Son*, he had strained every nerve to tell the sordid truth, though it often went against the grain of his nature. The worse side of life is far from being uppermost in David's recital of all that he had gone through; the uglier aspects are confined to the melodramatic excrescences on what may be regarded as the authentic story. And this, although it must not be taken as literally authentic, does read like the literal truth. The characters in it are as solid as the ground they stand on. That is the very reason why the reader sometimes exclaims at the wellnigh inconceivable hardness and odiousness of some of them, the Murdstones, for instance.

"I was sorry, David, I remarked," said Mr Murdstone, turning his head and his eyes stiffly towards me, "to observe that you are of a sullen disposition. This is not a character that I can suffer to develop itself beneath my eyes without an effort at improvement. You must endeavour, Sir, to change it. We must endeavour to change it for you."

"I beg your pardon, Sir," I faltered. "I have never meant to be sullen since I came back."

"Don't take refuge in a lie, Sir!" he returned so fiercely, that I saw my mother involuntarily put out her trembling hand as if to interpose between us. "You have withdrawn yourself in your sullenness to your own room. You have kept your own room when you ought to have been here. You know now, once for all, that I require you to be here and not there.

Further, that I require you to bring obedience here. You know me, David. I will have it done."

Miss Murdstone gave a hoarse chuckle.

"I will have a respectful, prompt, and ready bearing towards myself," he continued, "and towards Jane Murdstone, and towards your mother. I will not have this room shunned as if it were infected, at the pleasure of a child. Sit down."

He ordered me like a dog, and I obeyed like a dog.

There is just a hint, in another passage, of a distant likeness to Pecksniff:

"Jane Murdstone," said Mr Murdstone to his sister, "any harsh words between us are, I hope, uncommon. It is not my fault that so unusual an occurrence has taken place to-night. I was betrayed into it by another. Nor is it your fault. You were betrayed into it by another. Let us both try to forget it. And as this," he added, after these magnanimous words, "is not a fit scene for the boy—David, go to bed!"

But Murdstone is not a hypocrite or an impostor, only one of the fiendishly self-righteous, diabolically pleased with himself and his genial sister. This is no caricature. Who would want to invent such a character or such a conversation? It reads like the record of an incident burnt into the lad's consciousness. Dickens has produced no such realism till now. And, if the Murdstones seem to border upon the impossible, though a moment's reflection convinces that they do not, what is to be said of that strange aberration of nature, Miss Mowcher, as the voluble mite of a woman first appears to David Copperfield, from under "a great umbrella that appeared to be walking about of itself"? It is known that she was drawn from life; the original was recognized, and protested against the unfairness of mimicking her physical deformities.<sup>1</sup> Dickens had to compromise with the poor lady; hence the discrepancy between her first and her later appearances. Some such accident must have happened also in the case of Rosa Dartle. There is an unresolved contradiction there too, which he passes over lightly, leaving a blur. Neither one nor the other seems to be the sort of character Dickens would invent. They are oddities,

<sup>1</sup> Forster, ii. 108.

and not quite impossible oddities, but not particularly humorous. In characters of the Murdstone stamp, or that of Creakle, whose only active part in running the school at Blackheath is to flog and maltreat the boys, features only too faithfully observed by Dickens in his days of misfortune are, no doubt, only too faithfully reproduced. These are not the rarities of human nature that he was to make it his delight and his occupation to collect, when, as he expresses it in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, "Figuratively speaking, I travel for the great house of Human Interest Brothers, and have rather a large connexion in the fancy goods line."

*A boy's auto-biography* For this is autobiography, and David is recounting the enduring recollections of his boyhood. Even the grown-up Charles Dickens could never give much more than the outsides of his characters; a boy would not see even as much as all that. The trouble with the Murdstones and their like is that they are firmness and callousness and nothing else; there is something insensate and incredible about them. Their grim faces are like inquisitors' masks; nothing is revealed of what lies behind. But that is a tribute to David's veracity, and to the realism of Dickens, who had to tell the boy's story as a boy would tell it. A boy would remember every brutal syllable in every brutal sentence; he would remember it to his dying day. In nothing is Dickens more palpably true than in the exactness with which he reproduces the intense sensitivity of childhood. Like David he remembered it all—the poignant sense of finality in the griefs and disasters of boyhood, the feeling that what is done or undone can never be made up for; that a joy missed, a pleasure ruined, is something irretrievable. And the difference between the chapters on the Murdstone persecution and the boy's experiences later is thoroughly in character. The boy will be sure to make a god and a hero of the older boy who deigns to be his friend and protector. Steerforth will be all that is gallant and chivalrous, and the world will go upside down before David will be forced to admit that his idol is hollow. Not only in retrospect is it that the experiences of childhood appear through a golden haze. It is the later melodrama, again, that is responsible for inconsistency in the

case of Steerforth and of Little Em'ly: Steerforth is idealized by the boy, and has to be exposed by the man; the Little Em'ly of the Peggottys' old boat on the Yarmouth sands and the girl who runs away and is betrayed by Steerforth are not the same person. David's eyes have been opened now; but the false romance has become such a rooted part of the story that Dickens can only make the best he may of a bad job. The Steerforth affair is interwoven with a skill that shows how far he had advanced since he was satisfied with the happy-go-lucky scheme of *Martin Chuzzlewit*: but it contributes very little to the biography of David Copperfield.<sup>1</sup>

¶ As to this, it has often been said that David himself does not *David's* emerge very clearly, and that he is only a looking-glass in which *character* a wonderful set of characters are reflected.<sup>1</sup> It is a common enough effect in autobiography. A writer may draw the vividest portraits and convey his experiences with a vigour and incisiveness beyond all praise, and yet he himself may seem to dissolve and fade out of the picture. But is it so with David Copperfield? Look at the small boy wanting to "hear some more about the Crorkindills" from Peggotty, and then going on to the alligators. Then his mental sufferings in the house of bondage under Murdstone and Grinby, and his feelings when he has made his escape and is sent to Dr Strong's school, and has to take his place with the other boys; they try to put him at his ease:

It seemed to me so long, however, since I had been among such boys, or among any companions of my own age, except Mick Walker and Mealy Potatoes, that I felt as strange as ever I have done in all my life. I was so conscious of having passed through scenes of which they could have no knowledge, and of having acquired experiences foreign to my age, appearance, and condition as one of them, that I half believed it was an imposture to come there as an ordinary little schoolboy.

Take the growing boy a few years later, growing to manhood and growing in self-consciousness. David has not been to college and mixed with the swells, and Steerforth's impeccable

<sup>1</sup> "David is merely the looking-glass in which we see the other characters, the voice through which they speak" (Leacock, 121).

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valet scares the raw youth every time he brings him his shaving-water or lays out his clothes.

Every morning we held exactly this conversation: never any more and never any less; and yet, invariably, however far I might have been lifted out of myself overnight, and advanced towards maturer years, by Steerforth's companionship, or Mrs Steerforth's confidence, or Miss Dartle's conversation, in the presence of this most respectable man I became, as our smaller poets sing, "a little boy again."

After all, autobiography can only state experiences and express feelings; it is almost as an indirect result that it puts the man himself before the eye. But to do this is the express object in many autobiographies, though not by any means in all, and David Copperfield emerges a real man. He is not literally Dickens the novelist. In that sense, the protest of Charles Dickens the Younger may be accepted, when he says, except in the incidents known to all who have read the *Life*, "there is nothing, notwithstanding the popular theories on the subject, autobiographical about the book."<sup>1</sup> But the attitude of Mrs Dickens and her son on the question of publishing what they thought disreputable facts has been touched upon already. *David Copperfield* is a more intimate revelation than Forster's or any other biographer's of the trials and experiences that formed the character, kindled the human sympathies, and trained the outer and the inner eye of the potential novelist. ¶

*The  
idyll of  
married  
life*

¶ After the years of childhood, the slavery at the warehouse, his deliverance therefrom and his days at school, David begins life in earnest as a clerk to the firm of Spenlow and Jorkins in Doctors' Commons, and speedily falls in love with Dora Spenlow. The memorable chapters on that ecstatic affair, and on their courtship, marriage, and domesticity, might almost be described as a prose-poem of love and wedlock. It is an enchanting idyll, which Dickens was sane enough to treat with delicate humour, whilst he entered whole-heartedly into all the transports. He smiles tenderly at the raptures and

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *David Copperfield* (1892). Charles Dickens the Younger (1837-1896) was much in demand for prefaces to his father's books. It is to be hoped that he understood the others better than he did *David Copperfield*.

extravagances, the foolishness of the child-wife, and David's futile efforts to form Dora's mind, only relinquished when it dawned upon him that her mind was formed already. The mock-seriousness of the sentimental register never grates upon the feelings; mockery is indeed far too harsh a word for such fine badinage, so near to pathos.

I sat down by my wife on the sofa, and put the ear-rings in her ears; and then I told her that I feared we had not been quite as good company lately, as we used to be, and that the fault was mine. Which I sincerely felt, and which indeed it was.

"The truth is, Dora, my life," I said; "I have been trying to be wise."

"And to make me wise too," said Dora, timidly. "Haven't you, Doady?"

I nodded assent to the pretty inquiry of the raised eyebrows, and kissed the parted lips.

"It's of not a bit of use," said Dora, shaking her head, until the ear-rings rang again. "You know what a little thing I am, and what I wanted you to call me from the first. If you can't do so, I am afraid you'll never like me. Are you sure you don't think, sometimes, it would have been better to have——"

"Done what, my dear?" For she made no effort to proceed

"Nothing," said Dora.

"Nothing?" I repeated.

She put her arms round my neck, and laughed, and called herself by her favourite name of a goose, and hid her face on my shoulder in such a profusion of curls that it was quite a task to clear them away and see it.

"Don't I think it would have been better to have done nothing, than to have tried to form my little wife's mind?" said I, laughing at myself. "Is that the question? Yes, indeed, I do."

"Is that what you have been trying?" cried Dora. "Oh, what a shocking boy!"

"But I shall never try any more," said I. "For I love her dearly as she is."

"Without a story—really?" inquired Dora, creeping closer to me.

"Why should I seek to change," said I, "what has been so



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precious to me for so long! You can never show better than as your own natural self, my sweet Dora; and we'll try no concealed experiments, but go back to our old way, and be happy."

"And be happy!" returned Dora. "Yes! All day! And you won't mind things going a morsel wrong, sometimes?"

"No, no," said I. "We must do the best we can."

"And you won't tell me, any more, that we make other people bad," coaxed Dora; "will you? Because you know it's so dreadfully cross."

"No, no," said I.

"It's better for me to be stupid than uncomfortable, isn't it?" said Dora.

"Better to be naturally Dora than anything else in the world."

*The other characters* The characters in *David Copperfield* are as familiar to an English reader as those in *The Pickwick Papers*; and none of Dickens's defy analysis more flatly, none are so little to be described as types or mere representative figures, as some have absurdly imagined them to be, apparently because they are so unlike the average products of convention, whom we meet daily, in fiction and in life.<sup>1</sup> Dickens put types and averages and abstractions only into the lifeless stage-stuff which he used as padding in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, or played off as edifying examples in such a novel as *Dombey and Son*. Steerforth and his mother are almost the only traces of such shallow characterization here. Of the remainder, there are probably very few that did not originate in people Dickens had known, though it would profit little to trace and identify those whose veritable lineaments were, in every case probably, transmuted and altogether transcended. Enough to know that Mr Micawber bears some inscrutable relation to Dickens's father; that Dickens senior was the proximate cause of a vision which projected that immortal figure on his son's imagination. It is the vision that is wonderful, not the facts which prompted it, even if these help a little to explain what

<sup>1</sup> It was Miss Georgina Hogarth that affirmed, "all his characters were types and not actual people" (Wright, 219). But Dickens's sister-in-law was perhaps a little hazy about the meaning of the word "type."

is ultimately inexplicable. So the curious may, if they please, look for the humble originals of the Peggottys, Mrs Gummidge, Betsey Trotwood, Tommy Traddles, Dora and Agnes, or even that dear old whimsicality, Mr Dick. One alone among the most prominent and active figures challenges a little further scrutiny, the slimy impostor, Uriah Heep. Dickens has been blamed in this case for unsoundness and forcing the note. But, except that he makes capital out of the man's rascality, using him as the agent of Mr Wickfield's ruin, to be followed by that gentleman's complete restoration, there is surely no inconsistency of drawing in either Uriah or his mother. The obvious comparison or contrast is with Mr Pecksniff. Both are hypocrites, both rogues, of different shades of roguery. Pecksniff's hypocrisy is a part of the man; it is instinctive, it is so ingrained that he may be supposed to be unconscious of it. That of Heep is adopted deliberately, and rehearsed till it has become a second nature; it is the ugly offspring of hatred, greed, and cunning. Pecksniff excites comic disgust, Uriah Heep terror. Dickens was interested in Uriah Heep, as the chance product of a social system that ought to be effete; and puts a long speech in his mouth which is a little disquisition on that topic. Heep continues:

"When I was quite a little boy," said Uriah, "I got to know what umbleness did, and I took to it. I ate umble pie with an appetite. I stopped at the umble point of my learning, and says I, 'Hold hard!' When you offered to teach me Latin, I knew better. 'People like to be above you,' says father, 'keep yourself down.' I am very umble to the present moment, Master Copperfield, but I've got a little power."

Mrs Trotwood and the Peggottys redeem the credit of human nature from the aspersions cast upon it by any number of Steerforths, Littimers, Murdstones, and even Uriah Heeps. There is a better kind of poetic justice in their serenity and self-content amid the trials of life than in the wholesale assize at the conclusion, when Steerforth is brought from the ends of the earth to be drowned in sight of the home he had desolated, Ham Peggotty, his betrayed friend, dying in the attempt to

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save him; and the Heeps, son and mother, with the nefarious Littimer, are discovered by David and Tommy Traddles in the gaol presided over by their old tyrant Creakle. For arbitrary stage-management Dickens never beat this. "

"*Bleak House*"

Dickens was busy now with his new magazine, *Household Words*, which he started in 1849 and edited for ten years. In this or the later *All the Year Round*, a number of first-class stories of varying lengths made their original appearance, to be collected afterwards as *Christmas Stories*. His next novel, *Bleak House* (1853), which had been coming out in parts for eighteen months, brought into forced conjunction an extraordinary miscellany of the sensational and sentimental, pseudo-tragic and tragi-comic, the satirical, fiercely polemical, and almost as fiercely philanthropic. It is a book with a purpose, or several purposes, which are pursued by the method of exposure and ridicule. Dickens perhaps this time had too many irons in the fire; some of the satire hits the mark, much of it flies wide. And the sinister note, the dominant and most impressive characteristic, is more than a little forced. Ruskin was justified in objecting to a death-roll of nine prominent characters, "besides the baby, by fever, and a lively young Frenchwoman left to be hanged."<sup>1</sup> And this, as he pointed out, "in a narrative intended to be amusing, and as a properly representative average of the statistics of civilian mortality in the centre of London." *Bleak House* comprehends as large and miscellaneous a body of characters as any single one of the novels, except *The Pickwick Papers*. All have some sort of footing in the plot, which, though by no means flawless, is an ingenious construction. Two main strands are skilfully interlaced: the interminable Chancery suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, with its blighting repercussions, and the mystery of Lady Dedlock's sin and the circumstances leading to her

<sup>1</sup> He tabulates the deaths and their causes, assassination, starvation with phthisis, chagrin, spontaneous combustion, sorrow, remorse, insanity, and paralysis (*On the Old Road*, iii., "Fiction Fair and Foul," paragraph 8). Dickens brought forward evidence in the preface to show that Krook's death by "spontaneous combustion" was not unprecedented. It is more interesting to notice Zola, forty years later, describing the death of the inebriate Antoine Macquart in much the same terms: "C'était le plus beau cas de combustion spontanée qu'un médecin eût jamais observé" (*Dr Pascal*, ix.).

expiation.<sup>1</sup> The slow progress of that suit, the scenes in court and in counsel's chambers, and all the complications, anxieties, and suspense arising out of it, compose a dark emotional background. Whatever is going on before the eye at any given moment, the terrible case is there behind the scenes, dragging on relentlessly and foreboding more evil.

Fair wards of court have faded into mothers and grandmothers; a long procession of Chancellors has come in and gone out; the legion of bills in the suit have been transformed into mere bills of mortality; there are not three Jarndyces left upon the earth perhaps, since old Tom Jarndyce in despair blew his brains out at a coffee-house in Chancery Lane; but Jarndyce and Jarndyce still drags its weary length before the Court, perennially hopeless.

It is Dickens's most elaborate and telling attack upon one *Social abuses: denunciation and satire* of his chief detestations, the delays and iniquities of the law. Having worked as a young man in a lawyer's office, he knew his brief from the inside as well as from the point of view of the unfortunate public. In the preface, he recalled enough well-known cases to demonstrate that the Court of Chancery was guilty of even worse offences than its proceedings over Jarndyce and Jarndyce; and he knew enough about the legal profession to barb the satire as well as the indictment. But this monstrous incubus on the body politic was not the only object of attack. The travesty of political claptrap in the talk about Boodle and Coodle and Buffy and Cuffy is directed, not at anything or anybody that ever appeared on the actual Parliamentary stage, but at the pretentious nonsense in some of the fashionable novels.<sup>2</sup>

He (Lord Boodle) perceives with astonishment that, supposing the present government to be overthrown, the limited choice of the Crown in the formation of a new ministry would lie between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle—supposing it to be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with

<sup>1</sup> It is noticeable that we are more touched by the death of Lady Dedlock than by most of Dickens's carefully prepared pathos, although he evidently thought that she gets only her deserts, and therefore does not expiate upon it.

<sup>2</sup> Masson thought this one of the best passages in *Bleak House*, and calculated to annihilate the fashionable nonsense (*British Novelists and their Styles*, 231-232).

Goodle; which may be assumed to be the case, in consequence of the breach arising out of that affair with Hoodle.

This, however, is only incidental; the caricatures of those unparagoned philanthropists Mrs Jellyby and Mrs Pardiggle have a calculated object. Blatant and crude though they be, like that of Chadband, an abridgment of Pecksniff parodied, they did not miss their mark. Both these grotesque women are examples, not only of vanity and conceit, but more expressly of that ostentatious charity which is an offence, and of the meddlesome and misdirected energy that does far more mischief than good. In conjunction with the heart-rending scenes of misery, disease, and neglect, they were forcible arguments for a more enlightened treatment of social evils. No doubt, the pictures of want and suffering were not free from exaggeration. But *Bleak House* was as instrumental as any single book or document of that era in bringing about a better organization of charity.

*A novel of suspense and terror* *Bleak House* is definitely a novel of purpose. But, if Dickens had the worthiest motives in his mind when writing it, his taste for the piteous and harrowing, the funereal and ghastly, made him expatiate on those aspects for their own dramatic or melodramatic sake. There had been Gothic features in *Oliver Twist* and *Barnaby Rudge*; but they are so large an ingredient in *Bleak House* that this is probably the best modernized version of Radcliffian romance that the nineteenth century can show. All the apparatus of terror is there, and used with an art and a sensitivity to occult suggestion far beyond Mrs Radcliffe. Dickens knew better than to offer some banal explanation of such a fascinating mystery as "the faithful step upon the Ghost's Walk" at the Dedlock mansion, or not to elicit sensations of dread from the painted ceiling and the figure of the Roman with pointing finger in the murder room at Mr Tulkinghorn's. The book is full of such haunted scenes; a sinister and daunting atmosphere weighs upon the reader. The pictures of back streets and slums, which passed with some for fearless realism, whether wilfully exaggerated or not, did harmonize perfectly with these glooms and horrors, with the foulness and depravity, the wretchedness and corruption,

festering in dark corners of the city, and the bodings of crime and revenge in the ancient houses. Obviously, it is all described with an eye for theatrical effect; but, at any rate, the effects are secured, and the description even attains to a grim poetry. The visit to the rag-and-bone shop, the search for Jo in Tom-all-Alone's, the burial of our dear brother here departed in "a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as a savage abomination," the "hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed," if realism at all, are the realism that may be paralleled from Dante's *Inferno*.

With houses looking on, on every side, save where a reeking little tunnel of a court gives access to the iron gate—with every villainy of life in action close on life—here, they lower our dear brother down a foot or two: here, sow him in corruption, to be raised in corruption: an avenging ghost at many a sick-bedside: a shameful testimony to future ages, how civilization and barbarism walked this boastful island together.

Come night, come darkness, for you cannot come too soon, or stay too long, by such a place as this! Come, straggling lights into the windows of the ugly houses; and you who do iniquity therein, do it at least with this dread scene shut out! Come, flame of gas, burning so sullenly above the iron gate, on which the poisoned air deposits its witch-ointment slimy to the touch! It is well that you should call to every passer-by, "Look here!"

With the night, comes a slouching figure through the tunnel-court, to the outside of the iron gate. It holds the gate with its hands, and looks in between the bars; stands looking in, for a little while.

It then, with an old broom it carries, softly sweeps the step, and makes the archway clean. It does so, very busily and trimly; looks in again, a little while; and so departs.

Jo, it is thou? Well, well! Though a rejected witness, who "can't exactly say" what will be done to him in greater hands than men's, thou art not quite in outer darkness. There is something like a distant ray of light in thy muttered reason for this:

"He wos very good to me, he wos!"

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In this novel perhaps better than in any other, Dickens displays his power of evoking an emotional and moral atmosphere out of physical objects: ruined and degraded old houses, seared with memories of ancient crimes; obscene courts and alleys, haunted by criminals and records of sudden death. Their gruesome visages intensify the fear of horrors to come. Things seem to grow sentient: doors, windows, chimneys, carved figures, the very paving-stones, take on a physiognomy. The boundary between the quick and the dead, the human and non-human, fades away; the background ceases to be mere scenery, it comes alive to join in the ghastly drama, or to grin and sneer and triumph over the victim of evil passion or of fate. On the one hand, this is a modernization, much abler than Harrison Ainsworth's, of the Radcliffian abbeys and castles, dungeons and mediæval furniture; and in spite of its obviously emotive character, and some over-strain, it does convey the ghostly sensations which the old romancer strove to arouse; on the other, it is radically the same set of devices by which Hardy and other modern masters have made the scenery, the visible surroundings, an active element in the drama.<sup>1</sup> Dickens notably illustrates the continuity of what has been roughly labelled as the Gothic element in romantic literature.

*Humorous characters* There is, however, plenty of comic relief in *Bleak House*, and it is very welcome. Like Mr Dick, in *David Copperfield*, the poor little woman, Miss Flite, whose mind has been unhinged by having had "the honour to attend Court regularly," throws doubt on the æsthetic doctrine that madness can never be a legitimate subject for humour.

"With my documents. I expect a judgment Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. I have discovered that the sixth seal mentioned in the Revelations is the Great Seal. It has been open a long time! Pray accept my blessing."

The poor creature may profitably be contrasted with Scott's litigimaniac, Peter Peebles. From among the regular myrmidons of the law stand out the ghoulish Mr Vholes, Conversation Kenge, the small fry, such as vulgar Mr Guppy and the rest of

<sup>1</sup> E.g. in *The Return of the Native* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

the clerks, and the imperturbable and most efficient police-inspector, Mr Bucket. "Old Mr Turveydrop, in the full lustre of his Department," is another excellent bit of humour. The oily Mr Chadband, Mrs Jellyby with her natives of Borrioboola-Gha, and her paralysing rival, Mrs Pardiggle, would be mere creatures of farce, had they not been such glaring examples of futile charity in a world so grievously in need of the genuine article. Apart from the question of their legitimacy as recognizable portraits of friends, the irascible Boythorn and Skimpole the genial debtor—money not repaid is money in hand—are no blot upon the book, but add considerably to the mirth whenever they appear. It was a point for Dickens to settle with Landor and Leigh Hunt; posterity need not complain.<sup>1</sup>

There is little truly representative of Dickens in *Hard Times* (1854), beyond the sincerity and ardour with which he champions the unfortunates bleeding under the wheels of modern industrialism. Taine, misguidedly though not incomprehensibly, chose to annotate the book as a typical example of Dickens's novels. But the proper place for *Hard Times* is with the pamphleteering literature of Carlyle and Ruskin, to the former of whom it was dedicated, whilst the latter gave the book a cordial welcome, not refraining, however, from pointing out how much more effective it would have been, as a controversial tract, had the writer used "severer and more accurate analysis."<sup>2</sup> But this was asking the impossible of Dickens. Before writing *Martin Chuzzlewit*, he had noted down his observations of industrial conditions in Manchester, of the life of the working classes, and the relations of manufacturers and employees; and he now made a special journey to Preston to be eye-witness of a strike. He tried honestly to make himself master of the subject and to handle it

<sup>1</sup> Boythorn is not merely a sketch of Landor's external peculiarities; it was a study of his character, and of modes of thought and behaviour which no one but this extraordinary man could have had (see *Memoir of Frances Trollope*, by F. E. Trollope, ii. 155-160, where this is substantiated by characteristic letters of Landor's).

<sup>2</sup> *Unto this Last*, i., see 10 n. Mr Chesterton contends that Dickens was "the one Englishman who happened to keep his head" at a time when even Carlyle and Ruskin "were simply Tories making out a romantic case for the return of Toryism" (*Criticisms and Appreciations*, 174-175).



impartially. But, as to analysis, his mind had never been trained for it, and was perhaps constitutionally incapable of the operation. Warmth of heart, not coolness of brain, decided him one way or the other, more even than was the case with Carlyle or Ruskin. In truth, there was no decision in the matter, only instant response to an appeal to his feelings. He had taken his side long ago, before the emancipated slave of the blacking-factory had written a line of fiction. Dickens could be relied upon to champion the weak in any hostilities between rich and poor, capitalist and wage-slave. Hence his study of the situation between capital and labour turned into nothing but a heated protest. There is prejudice in his statement of the case; the conclusion is forestalled from the beginning. *Hard Times* is a tender-hearted and unreasoning *petitio principii*.

*The characters* By sheer force of scorn and indignation, Dickens galvanized his two personifications of blind slave-driving energy and greed, Gradgrind and Bounderby, into a semblance of life: like some of his more authentic creations, the pair have entered as permanent myths or synonyms into current thought and speech. All the more so, inasmuch as the book itself has now become a chapter, or at least a famous page, in the annals of social controversy. Thomas Gradgrind has at any rate some redeeming points as a figure of satire; and, if Bounderby must be described, as Ruskin described him, as "a dramatic monster, instead of a characteristic example of a worldly master," it must be agreed, with Andrew Lang, that he "is really very close to actual fact."<sup>1</sup> But the reason why fact does not help much in fiction is suggested by Mr Chesterton, who says of this novel, "It is perhaps the one place where Dickens, in defending happiness, for a moment forgets to be happy."<sup>2</sup> Dickens had thrown himself on the defensive, and so had to be as aggressive as possible, and do his worst for those whom he simply conceived as the enemy. He could not afford the least touch of geniality to Gradgrind and Bounderby, such as he had allowed to Bumble, and even to Sir Leicester Dedlock and Mr Tulkinghorn. And he had to wring pathos and nothing but pathos out of the tragedy of Stephen Blackpool and Rachel. Nothing was

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the Gadshill edition, viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Criticisms and Appreciations*, 176.

permitted to relieve the tension but the byplay of such casual onlookers as his riding-masters, Mr E. W. B. Childers, "so justly celebrated for his daring vaulting act as the Wild Huntsman of the North American Prairies," and Mr Sleary, with the lisped aphorisms: "Make the betht of uth; not the wurtht. I've got my living out of the horth-e-riding all my life, I know; but I conthider that I lay down the philothophy of the thubject when I thay to you, Thquire, make the betht of uth: not the wurtht!" Which shows how easy it was for Dickens to make the "betht" even out of a case that in his hands looked hopeless.

Dickens had a public object again in *Little Dorrit* (1857), "*Little* written at the end of the Crimean War, when there was loud *Dorrit*" outcry at the delays and inefficiencies of the great Government offices and the sheltered affluence of the drones who lurked there. The Barnacles met with the same sort of derisive welcome as a similar caricature of the "Limpets" would have had at the close of a later war. Young Barnacle, with his superior and recalcitrant eye-glass—he was "evidently going blind on his eye-glass side"—and his nervous efforts to maintain his gentility, is a skit of the roughest and readiest; the elder and statelier Tite Barnacle might have come out of a newspaper tirade:

Mr Barnacle dated from a better time, when the country was not so parsimonious, and the Circumlocution Office was not so badgered. He wound and wound folds of white cravat round his neck, as he wound and wound folds of tape round the neck of the country. His wristbands and collars were oppressive, his voice and manner were oppressive. He had a large watch-chain and bunch of seals, a coat buttoned up to inconvenience, a waistcoat buttoned up to inconvenience, an unwrinkled pair of trousers, a stiff pair of boots. He was altogether splendid, massive, overpowering, and impracticable. He seemed to have been sitting for his portrait to Sir Thomas Lawrence all the days of his life.

Dickens was always happy with names that branded. Perhaps they begged the question at issue; they were none the less useful bludgeons. "The Circumlocution Office"—

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Mr Barnacle pronounced the name "giving it the air of a word of about five-and-twenty syllables"—was, as a mere name, a great hit for administrative reform.<sup>1</sup> The prison scenes and incidental flings at minor abuses helped social agitation on other lines, when time grew ripe. The book was written, mostly if not entirely, at Paris, where Dickens made several long stays in winter and summer; and it was written in a time of depression, for himself and for other people, as is reflected in the sombre tone of it, a chronicle of misfortune, crime, selfishness and humbug, and very little of a cheerful complexion. It shows signs of overstrain, if not of exhaustion, though he was speedily to dissipate any apprehensions that his powers were declining.

*Plot and characters* The characters are as mixed in literary quality as they are in social station, and a number of those on which he clearly spent most pains are among the thinnest and poorest. As to the plot, it must have cost him endless trouble; one can almost see him in the act of trying clumsily to circumvent the various hitches that cropped up as he prepared his monthly instalments, with the result that it is merely tortuous and perplexing, the mainspring of the pseudo-tragic melodrama, Mrs Clennam's secret, proving only an empty snare. All that side of the story is of negligible interest, in comparison with the humours, of the central figure especially, the Father of the Marshalsea, in all his gimcrack dignity and bland magnanimity. But the note is often forced, and a large proportion of the character-drawing second-rate. The Dorrits and Clennams and the rest of the crowd may be sorted out by any discriminating reader into the usual three categories: the stage figures begotten of the plot, who are unfortunately always too near the footlights for their hollowness to escape notice; the travesties and exaggerations of the satire; and the genuine offspring of his comic imagination. The nominal hero is, except nominally, a minor character. Little Dorrit herself, who gives her name to the book and on

<sup>1</sup> Dickens first proposed to entitle the novel "Nobody's Fault," for reasons plain to anyone. Forster says that his original idea was of a man who should bring about all the mischief, lay the blame on Providence, and say at every fresh calamity: "Well, it's a mercy nobody was to blame!" (ii. 199).

whom he bestowed not only pains but also affection, is a dim saint from a window in the first volume, and a mere holy nincompoop in the second. The rogues are of all colours and dimensions. Merdle, the swindling banker, was drawn from the company-promoter John Sadleir, who committed suicide in one of Dickens's pastoral haunts near Jack Straw's Castle on Hampstead Heath (1856). The Frenchman Blandois may have been sketched from the forger and poisoner Wainewright, whose likeness had been done at full-length by Lytton in *Lucretia*, and whom Dickens was to introduce again in "Hunted Down." Of minor rascals, hypocrites, blackmailers, and ne'er-do-wells, there are plenty, in the Marshalsea or the wicked world outside. The patriarchal, and hypocritical, Mr Casby, it is to be noted, is a scandalous example of a slum landlord. He is the owner of Bleeding Heart Yard, and Mr Pancks, who is not so amusing as he was apparently meant to be, collects the rents. Says Pancks:

"Some of 'em will pull long faces to me, and say, Poor as you see us, master, we're always grinding, drudging, toiling, every minute we're awake. I say to them, What else are you made for? It shuts them up. They haven't a word to answer. What else are you made for? That clinches it."

There is another Frenchman in the story, sketched with an unfriendly pen, Monsieur Rigaud:

He had a restless air of being a handsome man—which he was not. It was mere swagger and challenge; but in this particular, as in many others, blustering and assertion goes for proof, half over the world.

One particular mark of the satire was snobbery. It was *The* nothing surprising to find the highly varnished Barnacles *satirical* established in their squeezed little house in Mews Street, and *figures* paying an enormous rent for their proximity to the splendours of Grosvenor Square. But Dickens discovers snobs in the most unexpected places, even in a debtors' prison, and proceeds to ring the changes on this piquant vice from simple sarcasm to the subtlest humour. In the haughty Fanny Dorrit the affectation is offensive, in young Barnacle laughable; but the case of old Dorrit is on a different plane, and transcends mere

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ridicule. To see the old bankrupt in the Marshalsea entertaining his humble pensioner, Nandy, "a very faithful old man," as he patronizingly calls him; and as the room is very small, "with a gulf between him and the good company of about a foot in width, standard measure," desiring Maggy to spread a newspaper on the window-sill for his modest repast whilst the company sits at the table, is an amazing bit of humorous extravagance. Dickens is too loving here for irony. He fondles the peccadillo with a tenderness of which Thackeray would have been incapable.

"Not ready for more ham yet, Nandy? Why, how slow you are! (His last teeth," he explained to the company, "are going, poor old boy!")"

At another time, he said, "No shrimps, Nandy?" and on his not instantly replying, observed, "His hearing is becoming very defective. He'll be deaf directly."

At another time, he asked him, "Do you walk much, Nandy, about the yard within the walls of that place of yours?"

"No, sir, no. I haven't any great liking for that."

"No, to be sure," he assented. "Very natural." Then he privately informed the circle, "Legs going."

Once he asked the pensioner, in that general clemency which asked him anything to keep him afloat, how old his younger grandchild was.

"John Edward," said the pensioner, slowly laying down his knife and fork to consider. "How old, sir? Let me think now." The Father of the Marshalsea tapped his forehead. "Memory weak."

The old pauper was actually two or three years younger; but old Dorrit loved to display his munificence and show off his pensioner's infirmities, "as if he were a gracious Keeper, making a running commentary on the decline of the harmless animal he exhibited." The catastrophe in this case is a beneficent one to the Dorrits, restoring them to more than their original wealth and grandeur. It is too much for the old man, who at a splendid banquet strikes consternation into his guests with the fixed delusion that he is entertaining his friends in the prison: "Ladies and gentleman, the duty

—ha—devolves upon me of—hum—welcoming you to the Marshalsea. . . . Supported by a small subscription of the —ha—Collegiate body. In return for which—hot water—general kitchen—and little domestic advantages. . . . I am accustomed to be complimented by strangers as the—ha—Father of the Marshalsea.” How the Dorrits of the Marshalsea, having become wealthy and discovered that they are the Dorrits of Dorsetshire, acquire demeanour, varnish, and the proprieties under the tuition of Mrs General, is also something much beyond mere satire. The satire does not miss its object; but Mrs General’s precepts and examples are a treasure for their own sake.

The dividing-line between the merely satirical figures and *The* the humours is, fortunately, vague and uncertain; if drawn *humours* too strictly it would entail the mutilation of several worthy personages. Old Dorrit, certainly, is of the higher order, at least in the main. Many have been sceptical about the tradition that he was drawn from the father of Dickens, who was also the original of Micawber: Dorrit and Micawber seem to have very little in common. But it is, surely, quite feasible that Dickens, after his wont, took one side of his father, one group of traits, and developed them to such a point of humorous fantasy that the pair, though opposite ribs of the same individual, would not pass even for brothers. The case throws a flood of light on the way his imagination worked. But then, Uncle Frederick, the pathetic little musician, would hardly be recognized for the elder Dorrit’s brother if the fact were not known. Divers others likewise fall betwixt and between: Miss Wade with her futile mystery, and such doubtful successes as Tattycoram and Gowan, who, anyhow, are too loosely attached to the general weft to matter much. Flora Finching, Arthur Clennam’s youthful love, who discomfits him with her faded charms and lackadaisical coquetries when she reappears long afterwards, though her dithyrambic chatter is delectable, is an offence to those who think of her as a retaliation on the lady who rejected Dickens and was subsequently the original of David Copperfield’s Dora. To some it is as if he had dragged Dora herself in

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the mud. But, even if the ultimate germ of character in the idyll and in the comedy of disillusionment came from the same source, too close an identification need not be supposed: that, again, most emphatically, was not how his mind worked.<sup>1</sup> It is pleasanter, nevertheless, to turn to the odd physiognomies of the dwellers in Bleeding Heart Yard and others, to Plornish and Mrs Plornish, to Mrs Affery, frightened to death by the baleful noises which she thinks she hears in the Clennam mansion,<sup>2</sup> or old Flintwinch and his dreaming wife, or Mrs Chivery, with her miraculous diction:

"He played with her as a child when in that yard a child she played. He has known her ever since. He went out upon the Sunday afternoon when in this very parlour he had dined, and met her, with appointment or without appointment which I do not pretend to say."

Smollett's habit of sketching his characters almost in the style of a lampoon when they are introduced can be seen in these and other cases. Here is Flintwinch:

His head was awry, and he had a one-sided, crab-like way with him, as if his foundations had yielded at about the same time as those of the house, and he ought to have been propped up in a similar manner. . . . There was nothing about him in the way of decoration but a watch, which was lowered into the depths of its proper pocket by an old black ribbon, and had a tarnished copper key moored above it, to show where it was sunk.

There is no venom in it; that is the difference. Even poor Maggy is like one of Smollett's beasts in human shape, though she is drawn lovingly instead of with savage humour:

She was about eight-and-twenty, with large bones, large features, large feet and hands, large eyes and no hair. Her large eyes were limpid and almost colourless; they seemed to

<sup>1</sup> The question has been amply discussed by the biographers; see J. W. T. Ley's long note in his edition of Forster (54-58). The harshest imputation is that Dickens was actually retaliating on Mrs Winter, the erstwhile blooming Maria Beadnell, which would have been disgusting. Even Mr Bernard Darwin (101-103) accepts that. Fortunately, it is mainly a question for the biographers.

<sup>2</sup> Note the same Gothic effect as in *Bleak House* when the old place eventually does collapse.

be very little affected by light, and to stand unnaturally still. There was also that attentive listening expression in her face, which is seen in the eyes of the blind; but she was not blind, having one tolerably serviceable eye.

Maggy is another of those mental deficient who contradict the theory that such derangements ought never to be brought into fiction. Dickens alone, perhaps, has handled this kind of grotesque with the proper tenderness. For even "that amazing little old woman," Mr F.'s Aunt, with her malevolent gaze and terrifying association of the most remote ideas, cannot be dissociated from the same odd species.

In his second historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), "A Tale of Two Cities" Dickens set himself to produce, not merely something very different from *Barnaby Rudge*, but a different thing from any of his other novels, "a story of incident," as he put it, in which the actors should express themselves through the story rather than in the dialogue. It is the only one of his novels that he called a tale. He had read Carlyle's *French Revolution*, and been carried away by it; his ambition was to tell such a story as would convey the effect that tremendous book had had upon himself. And, further, he was now aspiring and learning to emulate his friend Wilkie Collins, in the neat dovetailing of plots and the calculated administration of those ancient stimulants, terror and suspense. The novel that resulted stands out from the rest with the same distinctness and incongruity as characterized *Hard Times*, a few years before. Carlyle is stated to have sent Dickens two cartloads of books and other material for the task; but it is not on record that Dickens read these. It was not a historical study of the revolution that he had in mind.<sup>1</sup> He would write "*a picturesque story*," to reproduce his own italics, packed with the sensational events that would hold a theatre spellbound; for he had in his mind's eye all along what would go well on the stage, and was bitterly disappointed when his friend Régnier did not think fit to accept it for dramatization in a French theatre. Apart from the comic intervention of Miss Pross and the

<sup>1</sup> According to Leacock (p. 112), he was "inspired" at least as much by a melodrama "called the French Revolution" which he saw at Paris, as by Carlyle.



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thoroughly Dickensian figure of Jerry Cruncher, he deliberately abstained from humour and even from his usual raciness and abandon. He had to think of the dignity of history. *Barnaby Rudge* had been romance of a mixed type, though mainly sombre; this was to be the romance of terror and suspense in a purer form, of violent passions and of death in its most spectacular and appalling shape, with human magnanimity bracing itself for a last defiance and showing the world a noble example of self-sacrifice.

*A Tale of Two Cities* is not tragedy; it is not shapely, profound, and austere. But it is a powerful story; and the culminating scene, when Sydney Carton atones for a misspent life by his act of self-immolation, is nobly conceived and has made many a heart beat. The subordinate figures, the young aristocrat who owes his life to Carton's devotion, the heroine,<sup>1</sup> the bloodthirsty revolutionaries, Madame Defarge and the rest of the women of the Terror, are creatures of melodrama which he did his best to authenticate from such books as he had time to read and from other sources. But his own recollections of the days of mail-coaches and diligences, of an era, that is, which was that of many episodes in his other novels, and all that he had seen with his own eyes in his many sojourns in France, served him well enough in such incidental pictures as of the mail going over Shooter's Hill, the Royal George Hotel at Dover, the quiet sanctum of Tellson's bank, and the closing scene, the flight from Paris.

"Great  
Expectations"

Any misgivings engendered by the hardness of *Hard Times*, the inequality of *Little Dorrit*, and the grandiose artifice of *A Tale of Two Cities*, that the creative energy and humour of Dickens were on the wane, must have been put to rest by

<sup>1</sup> Wright says: "Apparently Charles Darnay in the story is Charles Dickens, and Lucie Manette is Miss Ternan" (288). Ellen Lawless Ternan, an actress who had appeared a few times with Dickens, and to whom he bequeathed £1000, is in this recent biography coupled with the novelist in the usual manner of the *chronique scandaleuse*. This in spite of Dickens's denunciation in the "violated letter" of the "two wicked persons" who in his own lifetime had so libelled "a young lady for whom I have great attachment and regard," and than whom "there is not on this earth a more virtuous and spotless creature." As Mr Bernard Darwin says in *Great Lives*, "there is not a scrap of evidence to show that Dickens's words about her were not absolutely true" (p. 114). The only proof vouchsafed is hearsay at two or three removes.

*Great Expectations*, in which the freshness and spontaneity of his previous autobiographical novel came to life again. Dickens was now settled at Gadshill, the goal of his boyish dreams of greatness; and the new story was thought out as he strode along the Kentish lanes or roamed farther afield in the marshlands between Thames and Medway, brooding over the dreary landscape that stretched away towards the great river and the sea. Old towns, and nooks and corners of the metropolis, come often enough into his novels, with much more than the effect of mere stage-furniture; but in no other do the physical features of a tract of rural England, with its hamlets, churches, and lonely dwellings, enter so intimately into the human chronicle. In the first two pages, an indelible picture is flung upon the mind's eye of the bleak and desolate marshes environing the tiny churchyard, where the orphaned Pip is crying to himself and weaving fancies over the graves of his parents and brothers and sisters. It is the first glimpse of a stage on which some fearful scenes are to be enacted; and with the lift of the curtain the drama begins. "Hold your noise!" cries a terrible voice, as a man starts up among the graves. "Keep still, you little devil, or I'll cut your throat!" It is the runaway convict, with the iron still on his leg, who years later is to be the arbiter of the boy's destinies. He sends the terror-stricken lad to get him food and a file.

Dickens never hit upon a finer opening. Here begins the first act in a drama that reaches its logical conclusion on the final page, when years have elapsed, and a number of people have been implicated in the web of fate connecting Pip and the strange fugitive. The earlier autobiography, *David Copperfield*, had been a straightforward history of childhood and young manhood, with a plot loosely tacked on. This time the plot is fundamental. That other had been in the main a domestic story, with more stirring episodes coming in, as they often do into the most commonplace life. *Great Expectations* is a novel of adventure, the sort of adventure that might well happen to a person who got himself mixed up with questionable characters, in such a spot as this, close to the convict-ships, or in what really were in those days the wilds of London. Pip has narrow

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escapes, and goes through many racking experiences; he has to be prepared for acts of violence, and before the end his manhood is put to the proof in a way unusual in a novel by Dickens. All this is related with a force and terseness equal to that of the initial scene. On the present occasion, Dickens had calculated his effects beforehand, and he secured them without beating about the bush, only once or twice having to fall back upon his regular expedient, barefaced coincidence. The drama has, moreover, what had been a rarity if not quite unexampled in Dickens, an inner side, in the effect of the great expectations and the subsequent contacts with people and events upon the character of Pip. He grows and changes and develops, which cannot be said without many qualifications of any single one in the previous novels. True, David Copperfield also grew up, and learned from experience how to face a complicated world. But in *David Copperfield* it was a sensitive boy's impressions of a crowd of extraordinary fellow-beings that were so absorbing; David himself left a pleasant but not a very memorable impression.

In *Great Expectations*, those Pip meets with are hardly less wonderful; but Pip himself is interesting, and still more interesting are the ordeals through which he arrives at self-knowledge, realizes the value of what he has slighted in Joe Gargery and Biddy, and puts himself right at last with those faithful friends. It is Dickens's one serious study of the growth of personality; and, though he lets Pip tell the story, he manages with great skill to bring out the true significance and the humour of the strange situations, without showing his own hand, and, notably, without the heavy moralizing which Thackeray put in the mouth of his imaginary autobiographer in *Lovel the Widower*, which appeared this same year.<sup>1</sup> There was much of the same vein of comedy in the tale of David's change of circumstances. Both boys are rescued from poverty, and find themselves in unfamiliar spheres. Both have their

<sup>1</sup> It had come out first in the *Cornhill Magazine*. Some misguided people would make out *Great Expectations* to be a didactic story, whilst others regard it as a satire on snobbishness, in Pip's pretences and uppishness and subsequent humiliations. A moral can, of course, be extracted from almost any story that is tolerably true to life. But Dickens kept clear more than usual here of the temptation to moralize.

troubles with manners and deportment. Sitting side by side with the nice boys at Dr Strong's school, David cannot forget that his recent associates were the street urchins, Mick Walker and Mealy Potatoes; and, when years later he writes his reminiscences, he can see the humour of his shyness and confusion at the visit to the Steerforths, how he blushed when the chambermaid brought him his hot water, and was a mere worm in the presence of Littimer, that superfine gentleman's gentleman. But Pip's agonies are much more trying. All the old friends and townsfolk who knew him as the poor boy in the blacksmith's shop have to be duly impressed with the fact that he is now a young gentleman with expectations. He has to flabbergast the old humbug Pumblechook, and show an imperturbable face to the scurrilous Trabb's boy's chaff.

Words cannot state the amount of aggravation and injury wreaked upon me by Trabb's boy, when, passing abreast of me, he pulled up his shirt-collar, twined his side-hair, stuck an arm akimbo, and smirked extravagantly by, wriggling his elbows and body, and drawling to his attendants, "Don't know yah, don't know yah, pon my soul don't know yah!"

And Pip is not David. His airs of dignity and condescension make him an easier prey to ridicule, and are the cause of untold anguish when he discovers the odious source of all his great expectations.

At this point the comedy grows serious; and Pip has the *Pip's* shock of his life to find that the rich benefactor is none other than the returned convict, whom he has been patronizing in his genteel chambers and lecturing with priggish superiority. Happily, Magwitch is not over-sensitive, and Pip fights down his abhorrence, comes gradually even to sympathize with the hunted wretch, and at last, cheerfully and with no thought of himself, faces considerable risk in trying to get him out of the country. Nothing Dickens had previously written showed him capable of revealing with such accuracy and delicacy all that went on in Pip's mind, from that midnight interview when Magwitch made himself known, to the terrible moment when Pip and the rest of the boat's crew are flung into the water, and

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presently he finds himself seated beside the recaptured man, who is on the way back to prison and the gallows.

For now my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted, wounded, shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe.

For Pip is not yet out of his predicaments. He still has to put himself right with Joe Gargery and Biddy. The great expectations have melted away, and left him resigned; but he cannot rest till he has wiped out his disloyalty to the old friend whose simple-heartedness and greatness of spirit have never even been conscious of it. The end Dickens had in mind for a story in which comedy and tragedy were so closely mixed was not the "happy ever after" which he was persuaded to substitute by Bulwer-Lytton.<sup>1</sup> Pip and Joe were to be the same frank and loving old friends again, as the child and man had been at the beginning, and Pip was to be reconciled to his baffled hopes and to the lot he had earned. That was the right note. Marrying him to Estella after all was a conclusion for which Dickens had not prepared, by the lucid baring of motive which he applied to the other chief characters.

*Pip's  
friends  
and foes*

It is remarkable how the characters in *Great Expectations* seem to fall into two divisions, according to their attitude towards Pip: the malignant and the friendly. It is further evidence of Dickens's careful dramatic planning. On the one side, the two half-realized fantasies, Miss Havisham and Estella, stand at the head. It would be rash to pronounce them impossible; Dickens may even have known two such anomalous beings. But he failed to explain and make them credible; they might not have looked so unreal had he gone a little deeper. The difficulty in accepting Miss Havisham is that the blow which unhinged her mind is so lightly and casually intimated. If Dickens comprehended her, she is as great a strain as Rosa Dartle on the comprehension of the reader. And Estella, whom she formed to avenge her on the other sex, is just

<sup>1</sup> The original close is given by Forster (ii. 324).

as artificial—a new sort of minx, as impenetrable to the reader as to the unfortunate Pip.<sup>1</sup>

Among the other thorns in the flesh to Pip are that violent governing female, his sister, Mrs Joe; “bullying old Pumblechook,” last avatar of the soul of Pecksniff and Chadband, who poses as the boy’s deeply injured patron; Mr Wopsle, playing George Barnwell, and identifying Pip with that “ferocious and maudlin” scapegrace; Sarah Pocket, and the rest of the snobs who rage at the boy’s elevation; Drummle the “Spider”; and, last not least, his relentless persecutor, Trabb’s boy. Orlick and Compeyson, the two murderous ruffians, are enemies of a more fearful brand. All the others who matter much go into the opposite corps. Joe and Biddy come first, from every point of view, and then the unfortunate Magwitch, as chief agent in the strange complication of destinies. Magwitch, it should be noted, in spite of some discrepancies, is no mere automaton; as a study of the operations of a primitive mind he is not inferior to Joe Gargery. The men of law are the next in importance. Jaggers is a powerful creation; as Wemmick says, “There’s only one Jaggers.” His terrible clairvoyance! The way he turns you inside out!

If anybody wouldn’t make an admission, he said, “I’ll have it out of you!” and if anybody made an admission, he said, “Now I have got you!” The magistrates shivered under a single bite of his finger. Thieves and thief-takers hung in dread rapture on his words, and shrank when a hair of his eyebrows turned in their direction.

It is as daring a figure as Dickens ever imagined, but, like the rest, justified by results. The fault with Wemmick is that he is made too deliberately quaint; he is almost a museum specimen, with his everlasting injunction, “Get hold of portable property”; the little castellated mansion where he lives with his Aged P., and the famous “Halloa! Here’s a church! Let’s go in!” “Here’s Miss Skiffins! Let’s have

<sup>1</sup> Wright (pp. 298–299) identifies Estella (whose name is said to be manufactured out of the first syllables (*sic*) of the name Ellen Lawless Ternan) with Miss Ternan, supposed to have been just as impenetrable to Dickens.

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a wedding." Of the other dramatis personæ, hardly one is a mere supernumerary; certainly not that hopeful young fellow, Herbert Pocket, who makes such a practical job of turning Pip into a gentleman; nor the charming Clara, whom he marries. Her father, old Bill Barley, is neutral, an invisible though a very audible character, in his room upstairs, his grog ready mixed in a little tub on the table, and his voice heard at intervals hoarsely growling the refrain, in which Pip says, "I substitute good wishes for something quite the reverse":

"Ahoy! Bless your eyes, here's old Bill Barley . . . old Bill Barley on the flat of his back, by the Lord. Lying on the flat of his back, like a drifting old dead flounder, here's your old Bill Barley, bless your eyes. Ahoy! Bless you."

But the best of the lot, and the one who would have redeemed a duller story than Dickens ever wrote, is the man with the innocent soul of a child, Joe Gargery, that "worthy, worthy man," as Biddy calls him. Dickens loved integrity and revered the beauty of unselfishness and good-will, and was sometimes wise enough to see that to pay them due honour was better than any formal poetic justice. Never was there a truer example of what has been called a "Nature's gentleman." There is a veritable sublimity in such goodness of heart and utter selflessness, such sweetness of disposition, and humility combined with a proud self-respect. It sounds superhuman. But Joe is credible; the man lives.

"Pip, dear old chap, life is made of ever so many partings welded together, as I may say, and one man's a blacksmith, and one's a whitesmith, and one's a goldsmith, and one's a copper-smith. Divisions among such must come, and must be met as they come. If there's been any fault to-day at all, it's mine. You and me is not two figures to be together in London; nor yet anywheres else but what is private, and bekknown, and understood among friends. It ain't that I am proud, but that I want to be right, as you shall never see me no more in these clothes. I'm wrong out of the forge, the kitchen, or off th' meshes. You won't find half so much fault in me if, supposing as you should ever wish to see me, you come and put your head

in at the forge window and see Joe the blacksmith, there, at the old anvil, in the old burnt apron, sticking to the old work. I'm awful dull, but I hope I've beat out something nigh the rights of this at last. And so God bless you, dear old Pip, old chap, God bless you!"

I had not been mistaken in my fancy that there was a simple dignity in him. The fashion of his dress could no more come in its way when he spoke these words, than it could come in its way in Heaven. He touched me gently on the forehead, and went out. As soon as I could recover myself sufficiently, I hurried out after him and looked for him in the neighbouring streets; but he was gone.

This is not quoted as an example of Joe's gift of simple *Crafts-*English, so elemental that it seems to consist of things rather *manship* than mere words. It is his one long-winded speech, but it <sup>in "Great</sup> happens to express his homely philosophy. *Great Expectations*, <sup>*Expectations*</sup> in comparison with Dickens's besetting carelessness, is a masterpiece of verbal art, whether in narrative and description or in the dialogue. It is not more than half as long as his average novel; and whatever else this thriftiness indicates, it is a sign that Dickens kept his characters in their place, and did not let them display themselves for the sake of display, as was too often his wont, in the novel next to follow, for instance. He evidently saw his ending from the very first, and from time to time put in little hints of what was in store; as when Pip tells Miss Havisham that he only knows how to play beggar my neighbour, and she bids Estella, "Beggar him." It is almost as clear a warning as the later injunction, "Love her, love her, love her!" which is again as ominous as the notice Pip receives when there are other dangers about, "Don't go home!" The presentiments and intuitions, for instance, which somehow convince Pip that Jaggers's housekeeper is Estella's mother, and that her father is Magwitch, are among the links scattered all over the story which hold it firmly together. One thing they make clear and definite, that Estella was meant to be his bane and not his blessing: the altered ending falsified everything.

Like *Dombey and Son* and *Little Dorrit*, *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) was a coat of various colours; but this one looks shabby



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"Our  
Mutual  
Friend"

and second-hand. The ingenuity which Dickens had assimilated from Wilkie Collins, who at the same time was learning from him, is not discredited by the plot. But, apart from pains-taking elaboration, *Our Mutual Friend* is as far below his average as *Great Expectations* was above it. His novels are a succession of ups and downs, and this is conspicuously one of the downs. It looked as if Dickens was tired out, if not exhausted. It is almost a caricature of his usual style. He repeats himself, and more than half the characters are second-rate editions of earlier ones that can be recognized. Some would have been arresting had not their like and their superiors been seen before. The plot was necessary to hold it all together; but is not interesting in itself: the man supposed to be drowned, and keeping up the pretence that he is dead; amplified with further melodrama, murder and suspicion of murder; the sarcastic comedy of the Lammles, who marry each other for a fortune and are both disappointed, their efforts to have their revenge, on each other or on the snobbish Veneerings, whom they would like to hold responsible; and the miscellaneous threads of jealousy, rascality, folly, or mischance, which are twisted together to bring an incredible collection of characters into near or distant relation. Social satire, of objects that could hardly have had more substance than the caricatures which represent them, contributed the Veneerings and the foolish Lammles, Lady Tippins, Fascination Fledgeby, Mr Twemlow, and Boffin, the Golden Dustman, who receives orders from Mrs Boffin, "we're going in neck and crop for Fashion," and Mr Boffin's literary man, that wooden-legged scamp, Mr Silas Wegg; not to mention the canting Podsnap, "eminently respectable man," who felt it incumbent upon him "to take Providence under his protection." Then there are the Wilfers, the majestic mother, and the "boofer lady," Bella Wilfer, who sometimes pleases. They shade off into grotesquerie, with Boffin and Wegg's dealings with Mr Venus, in his crazy old shop; with Jenny Wren, the dolls' dressmaker, and Riah the old Jew, who was accepted by some as amends for Fagin, but certainly not on literary grounds. Darker things loom in the background or come into

the foreground with the grim activities of the longshoremen, old Hexam fishing the Thames for dead bodies and other spoil, the villainous Rogue Riderhood trying to fasten the guilt of murder on him, and the savage rivalry of the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone, with Eugene Wrayburn, for Lizzie Hexam. In this last, Dickens made a spasmodic attempt at tragic realism, and reached the goal in some scenes; but it does not all ring true. Headstone's pupil, the ill-conditioned cub Charley Hexam, is the nearest to unshrinking veracity of this group. Dickens's old exuberance was not quite spent, though he contented himself this time with so many odd concoctions.

*Great Expectations* and Dickens's unfinished novel, *The "Edwin Mystery of Edwin Drood"* (1870), but not *Little Dorrit*, were *Drood* written at Gadshill. The windows of his country house looked over the three towns, Strood, Chatham, and Rochester, and the spots which had been most familiar and most beloved since he spent what was after all a happy childhood there. It is easy to guess how much that was personal and sentimental went into his vivid picturing of the country and of the old town which he left unnamed, in the story of Pip and Joe Gargery; and the same feelings may be traced in the "Cloisterham" of *Edwin Drood*, with the venerable cathedral and the quiet buildings nestled round it. Dickens would have liked to be buried in the cathedral graveyard under the wall of the castle. He knew every inch of the country round about; and, though David Copperfield passes his childhood in Suffolk, it is to be noted that Dickens brings him later into Kent. Watts's Charity still has its hostel in Rochester High Street, and is the scene of one of the best of his *Christmas Stories*, "The Seven Poor Travellers." The time-worn physiognomy of the place is imprinted on the story of *Drood*, and the story has twined itself for ever with the features of the place; hardly a visitor to Rochester but looks for the gatehouse where Jasper lived, the choir-stalls where he sang, and the door to the crypt where his victim was believed to be buried. Dickens died when he was only in the middle of the story, and the mystery of *Edwin Drood* remains a mystery, the more haunting for that very incompleteness.

### 316 HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL

*The plot  
an  
insoluble  
riddle*

First and foremost, this is a novel of plot, although by no means poor in characters worthy of his best period. Dickens had, it must be supposed, drafted a puzzling complication of treachery and crime, the key to which was to be withheld until it could be produced with the maximum of dramatic effect. Edwin Drood, a young fellow who is evidently intended to engage everyone's good wishes, suddenly disappears. Suspicion points to one man, his dark and moody uncle, Jasper, the choirmaster and opium addict, who is known to have been his rival with little Rosa Bud; and the suspicion seems to be confirmed by various compromising facts, such as Jasper's collapse when he hears from Mr Grewgious that Edwin's engagement to Rosa had already been broken off by mutual consent, and the words of the old hag from the opium den in Shadwell, who has caught his incoherent mutterings as he lies half-stupefied: "I may have learned the secret how to make ye talk, deary." Forster and the members of the Dickens family were fully convinced that the plan was to bring the guilt home eventually to Jasper, who was to pay the penalty. On the other hand, such a tame conclusion would not have realized over-brilliantly the "very curious and new idea for a story" which Dickens told Forster he had conceived. The list of titles under consideration at one stage or another which Dickens left behind—there are nearly a score altogether—surely indicates that he meant to surprise his readers, rather than fulfil the expectations which numerous hints, cunningly inserted, had aroused. "The Loss of Edwin Drood," "Edwin Drood in Hiding," "The Disappearance of Edwin Drood," and "Dead or Alive?" suggest a revelation which would confound all such surmises and conjectures, and that the hints were meant to mislead. Dickens was not unaccustomed to putting his readers on a false scent, in a plot with a secret to be divulged. Perhaps the key to the mystery was that Drood had not been murdered. He may be alive somewhere, hiding from Jasper, until that dangerous person can be brought to book. Perhaps Jasper is under the delusion that he did do his nephew to death, in a state of semi-nightmare brought on by opium. What else can be the meaning of the person

with a lantern opening the crypt door, and confronted by, no ghost, but the figure of a living man, which was pictured on the green wrapper of the edition in monthly parts? Is it not Jasper, thunderstruck by the reappearance of his victim, still alive? At any rate, the question of the proposed ending is far from simple; Forster may have misunderstood or have been purposely left ungratified; and it has provoked a legion of theorists to provide their own solutions. Detective fiction still has a potent charm for many; it has become one of the great parlour-games of the post-war world. But, whatever answer to the riddle Dickens had in view, since it cannot be definitely ascertained from the scanty memoranda left behind, surely it is best to remember that he could have worked out with skill and plausibility any one of a number of plots, including most of those which have been put forward since. The reader's wisest plan is to select the one he likes best, and comfort himself with the assurance that it is what Dickens intended. What reasonable person need quarrel with such a manly resolve?

The characters go well with such a story, without being too *The* heavily coloured by its gloom. Rosa Bud is one of Dickens's *characters* best portraits of a young and unformed but likeable girl; and the elderly Jasper, though melodramatic and a fool to fall in love with her, has points that make him a little more interesting as an individual than Jonas Chuzzlewit, Mr Carker, and other stock villains. He has an admirable foil, too, in that worthy and cheery gentleman, Mr Crisparkle, whose name is a capital hit, even for Dickens.<sup>1</sup> The two Landlesses are ordinary but pleasant enough to sustain their part; but their guardian, the Reverend Mr Honeythunder, the philanthropist more given to preaching than practice, is more in the Dickens line, being of the tribe of Chadband and Pumblechook. So, too, the pompous mayor, Mr Sapsea, that "old Tory jackass" and "solemn donkey," as he is described in the stray scene found among the novelist's papers, "How Mr Sapsea ceased to be a member of the Eight Club." Mr Grewgious, the discreet old

<sup>1</sup> He seems to be the only member of the clerical profession drawn sympathetically by Dickens.

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solicitor, Tope, the verger, Durdles, the gruff old mason, the boy nicknamed Deputy who has probably seen something, and more especially the mysterious Datchery, prowling about like an amateur detective, were, no doubt, destined to play considerable parts in the sequel, and are introduced with the usual touches of the picturesque.

*"Christmas Stories": Dickens and the short story* In his earlier novels, Dickens frequently honoured an old custom by letting some character tell a short story to the assembled company. There are perhaps a dozen in *Pickwick*, if such a local legend as that of Bladud be counted. They are mostly of a playful or a sombre kind of grotesquerie, near or distantly akin to the supreme example of the genre, "Wandering Willie's Tale." "The Stroller's Tale" and "The Convict's Return" are trifles in the traditional style of gloom and pathos; "A Madman's Manuscript" and "A Queer Client" tales of vengeance, glorying in their own ferocity. Best of all and revealing more of Dickens are "The Bagman's Story" and "Gabriel Grub." The animistic chair in the former is a bit of jovial drollery, which might almost be taken as a conscious caricature of the way inanimate things come to life in his excited descriptions, the characteristic, also, of another master of atmosphere in fiction, Thomas Hardy.

Tom gazed at the chair; and, suddenly, as he looked at it, a most extraordinary change seemed to come over it. The carving of the back gradually assumed the lineaments and expression of an old shrivelled human face; the damask cushion became an antique, flapped waistcoat; the round knobs grew into a couple of feet, encased in red cloth slippers; and the old chair looked like a very ugly old man, of the previous century, with his arms akimbo. Tom sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes to dispel the illusion. No. The chair was an ugly old gentleman; and what was more, he was winking at Tom Smart.

The story of the goblins who stole the cross-grained sexton, Gabriel Grub, is an excellent frolic, with a moral against solitary drinking which would have qualified it for admission among the regular Christmas stories. In fact, the great majority of Dickens's minor pieces, several of them minor only

in length, are definitely associated with the great annual feast. They are little moralities, fairy-tales, or pictures of real life, conveying by one means or another a message of good-will. As already noticed, the *Christmas Books* were definitely of this gnomic character, with some intrusive satire of the big-wigs. Dickens apparently envisaged satire as one of the useful arts, requiring no apology even when it was dragged in by the heels; and here again he was justified by results, later times having benefited by his exposures of bumbledom, circumlocution offices, courts of chancery, debtors' prisons, and other scandals. The later *Christmas Stories*, first contributed to his own *Household Words* (1849-1859) and *All the Year Round*, which succeeded it,<sup>1</sup> are fairly free from this unseasonable element; but it sometimes thrusts up its head. "Nobody's Story," for instance, is little else than ineffective ridicule of the big-wigs; and even in one of the finest, "The Seven Poor Travellers," there is a dig at them, in the allusion to the large and stately board-room, taking up the lion's share of the constricted space at Richard Watts's Charity, the poor objects of the foundation being relegated to two outer galleries at the back, and even the matron and her daughter sadly "ill-conwenienced."

The hostel established in 1579 by Richard Watts, in the *Hero* main street of Rochester, has become such a starve-gut affair *stories* that the benevolent narrator of this last-named story provides a night of good cheer and wassail out of his own pocket, and entertains his humble guests with the exploits of Dick Doubledick. Observe that the date is 1854; hence the happy point that the sons of the English and the French officers who had fought and forgiven each other a generation ago were now fighting side by side in the Crimea, "like long-divided brothers." The story thus enframed is one of those in which the moral is not detachable, virtue, with the courage and serenity which it brings, being its own reward, and an ample one, though all else be lost. Such too is "The Wreck of the *Golden Mary*," the story told by the devoted captain, down to the moment when he drops exhausted, having steered his boat and

<sup>1</sup> After his death, in 1870, this was continued by Charles Dickens the Younger, but was absorbed in 1895 by a new *Household Words*.

passengers through the fearful seas off the Horn, for twenty-six days after the ship struck an iceberg. There was a man of action latent in Dickens, manifested not only in his conduct at the famous railway accident, but also in the indomitable energy, the furious activity, with which he kept readings, novels, editorial work, and personal and private duties, all going together, right to the end. Instances there may be of tales of gallantry and incisive descriptions of action by flood and field written by men who never heard a shot fired or pulled an oar in dangerous waters. But is there one such but the chronicler was incapacitated by physical infirmity or other inexorable circumstance from joining in the fray? Dickens showed his grit in other spheres of action. But he would not have displayed less presence of mind than Jonas Chuzzlewit in the carriage smash, or have let Mr Carker beat him in the headlong flight after his betrayal, and he would readily have taken Pip's hand in the attempted escape of old Magwitch. He told Forster some of the adventures he had had as a newspaper man working at high pressure: not one "had so much express and post-chaise experience as I." "I have had to charge for half a dozen breakdowns in half a dozen times as many miles." And to a gathering of his confrères:

"I have often transcribed for the printer, from my shorthand notes, important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising, writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post-chaise and four, galloping through a wild country, and through the dead of night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour. . . . I do verily believe I have been upset in almost every description of vehicle known in this country. I have been, in my time, belated on miry by-roads, towards the small hours, forty or fifty miles from London, in a wheelless carriage, with exhausted horses and drunken post-boys, and have got back in time for publication, to be received with never-forgotten compliments by the late Mr Black, coming in the broadest of Scotch from the broadest of hearts I ever knew. These trivial things I mention as an assurance to you that I have never forgotten the fascination of that old pursuit. The pleasure that I used to feel in

the rapidity and dexterity of its exercise has never faded out of my breast.”<sup>1</sup>

Gill Davis the marine’s report of the defence of the South American island against an overwhelming force of pirates, and the subsequent escape with the women and children on a raft down the river, in “The Perils of certain English Prisoners,” shows of what the pen of the old reporter was capable.

Other items are more unmistakably his. Everybody “*The* remembers Christopher the head-waiter, in “Somebody’s *Holly-Luggage.*” “The Holly-Tree” is rather tenuous and rather *Tree,* absurd romance; but it comprises the ravishing little tale, “*Mugby* admirably told by the Boots, of the elopement of the pair of *junction,*” seven-years-olds. They were off to Gretna Green; but Cobbs *etc.* tells them that they really must see Love Lane.

“Norah, dear,” said Master Harry, “this is curious. We really ought to see Love-lane. Put on your bonnet, my sweetest darling, and we will go there with Cobbs.”

“Well, Sir, they was tired out. All being so new and strange to ’em, they was tired as tired could be. And they laid down on a bank of daisies, like the children in the wood, leastways meadows, and fell asleep.”

There is a snowstorm in the Holly-Tree story which is another instance of that animation of inanimate things which assimilates Dickens to the ancient myth-maker.

Our horses tumbled down in solitary places, and we got them up—which was the pleasantest variety *I* had, for it warmed me. And it snowed and snowed, and still it snowed, and never left off snowing. All night long we went on in this manner. Thus we came round the clock, upon the Great North Road, to the performance of Auld Lang Syne all day again. And it snowed and snowed, and still it snowed, and never left off snowing. . . .

When we came in sight of a town, it looked, to my fancy, like a large drawing on a slate, with abundance of slate-pencil expended on the churches and houses where the snow lay

<sup>1</sup> Forster, i. 55-56.



thickest. When we came within a town, and found the church clocks all stopped, the dial-faces choked with snow, and the inn-signs blotted out, it seemed as if the whole place were overgrown with white moss. As to the coach, it was a mere snowball; similarly, the men and boys who ran along beside us to the town's end, turning our clogged wheels and encouraging our horses, were men and boys of snow; and the bleak wild solitude to which they at last dismissed us was a snowy Sahara. One would have thought this enough: notwithstanding which, I pledge my word that it snowed and snowed, and still it snowed, and never left off snowing.<sup>1</sup>

"Mugby Junction" is a quaint mixture of wayside haps, allegory, and occult experience, this last, perhaps, a little too like those actual occurrences, imperfectly reported, which find their way into chronicles of supernatural phenomena. Barbox Brothers, the commercial traveller, has divers interesting rencontres, one of his chance acquaintances being the signalman who tells him of the Appearance which has worried him lately. And, one day, the thing has happened: "Signalman killed this morning, Sir." But Phœbe, the crippled sempstress, with her text, "Always on the bright side," and Polly, the little girl lost, have a clearer appeal:

"But I am lost," said the child, nestling her little hand more closely in his, "and you'll take care of me, won't you?"

If ever a man were disconcerted by division between compassion on the one hand, and the very imbecility of irresolution on the other, here the man was. "Lost!" he repeated, looking down at the child. "I am sure *I* am. What is to be done?"

"Where do *you* live?" asked the child, looking up at him wistfully.

"Over there," he answered, pointing vaguely in the direction of his hotel.

"Hadn't we better go there?" said the child.

So they set off, hand-in-hand. He, through comparison of himself against his little companion, with a clumsy feeling on him as if he had just developed into a foolish giant. She,

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the wind—"I stirred the fire, moved my chair a little to one side of the screen, —not daring to go far, for I knew the wind was waiting to make a rush at me, I could hear it growling" (*Ibid.*).

clearly elevated in her own tiny opinion by having got him so neatly out of his embarrassment.

"We are going to have dinner when we get there, I suppose?" said Polly.

"Well," he rejoined, "I—— Yes, I suppose we are."

Barbox feels, before he leaves Mugby Junction, that "he was Barbox Brothers & Co. now, and had taken thousands of partners into the solitary firm."

In Mrs Lirriper's two stories, which are really one, though "*Mrs* they appeared at a year's interval, Dickens touched the heights *Lirriper*" of his pathos; and, if the little boy who becomes the light and life of the old lodging-house keeper in Norfolk Street, Strand, and of her established inmate, Major Jemmy Jackman, is a creature perhaps too bright and good "for human nature's daily food," sentiment on the whole is kept under restraint, and the humour is of the best.

"Ah! it's pleasant to drop into my own easy-chair my dear though a little palpitating what with trotting upstairs and what with trotting down, and why kitchen stairs should all be corner stairs is for the builders to justify though I do not think they fully understand their trade and never did, else why the same-ness and why not more conveniences and fewer draughts and likewise making a practice of laying the plaster on too thick I am well convinced which holds the damp, and as to chimney-pots putting them on by guesswork like hats at a party and no more knowing what their effect will be upon the smoke bless you than I do if so much, except that it will mostly be either to send it down your throat in a straight form or give it a twist before it goes there."

This exordium is enough to show that Mrs Lirriper has a literary style not inferior to the colloquial diction of Mrs Chivery, Flora Finching, or even Mrs Gamp. She never drops below this admirable level, and in her more exalted moods she rises above it. She and the major take in a young couple; and, the man bolting and the poor girl dying, are left with the boy on their hands. Then, after many years, comes the news: someone is on his death-bed in the town of Sens. They undertake the journey, and are just in time to recognize the poor sinner, little Jemmy's father, before he expires.

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*"I lifted him back upon the pillows and I says to him:*

*'Can you hear me?'*

*He looked yes.*

*'Do you know me?'*

*He looked yes, even more plainly.*

*'I am not here alone. The Major is with me. You recollect the Major?'*

*Yes. That is to say he made out yes, in the same way as before.*

*'And even the Major and I are not alone. My grandson—his godson—is with us. Do you hear? My grandson.'*

*The fingers made another trial to catch at my sleeve, but could only creep near it and fall.*

*'Do you know who my grandson is?'*

*Yes.*

*'I pitied and loved his lonely mother. When his mother lay a-dying I said to her, "My dear, this baby is sent to a childless old woman." He has been my pride and joy ever since. I love him as dearly as if he had drunk from my breast. Do you ask to see my grandson before you die?'*

*Yes.*

*'Show me then, when I leave off speaking, if you correctly understand what I say. He has been kept unacquainted with the story of his birth. He has no knowledge of it. If I bring him here to the side of this bed, he will suppose you to be a perfect stranger. It is more than I can do to keep from him the knowledge that there is such wrong and misery in the world; but that it was ever so near him in his innocent cradle I have kept from him, and I ever will keep from him, for his mother's sake, and for his own.'*

This is a height that Dickens did not surpass even in the next story, "Dr Marigold," where the king of the cheap-jacks, shouting his buffooneries to the village fair, his dying child in his arms, suddenly realizes that she is dead.

I felt her lift herself a little on my shoulder, to look across the dark street. "What troubles you, darling?" "Nothing troubles me, father. I am not at all troubled. But don't I see a pretty churchyard over there?" "Yes, my dear." "Kiss me twice, dear father, and lay me down upon that churchyard grass so soft and green." I staggered back into

the cart with her head dropped on my shoulder, and I says to her mother, "Quick. Shut the door! Don't let those laughing people see!" "What's the matter?" she cries. "O woman, woman," I tells her, "you'll never catch my little Sophy by her hair again, for she has flown away from you!"

But why did he drag in the churchyard? As to "No Thoroughfare" (1867), the tale in which he collaborated with Wilkie Collins, the overture preluded by the clock of St Paul's and then of the Foundling Hospital, conjuring up a characteristic vision of London; the physiognomy of Joey Ladle, the cellarman; and the house of unknown antiquity at Cripple Corner, under which burrowed the grim, pestiferous wine-vaults, bear the trade-mark of Dickens. But Collins must have been the elder hand in the manipulation of cause and event; and it is a pity he was so lavish of coincidence, and that he did not ask Tyndall whether the escape on the Simplon was a feasible exploit.

Out of this survey of his work from first to last, it is to be *The* hoped that enough has emerged on the position of Dickens *genius of* in relation to his immediate and to his more remote pre-*Dickens*decessors, and on the character of his genius, to render a formal summing-up superfluous. One thing, surely, is clear, that of all the English novelists who had written then, and it is at least as safe to say, of all who have written since he entered upon the scene, he is the one with the largest natural endowment, the one with the most prolific imagination and the richest humour. Dickens received but a poor education, and the training he gave himself was defective in many ways, though, as already suggested, his early struggles and the consequent intimacy with the lower and racier layers of the population were a training not less valuable than that which he underwent as a reporter and an irregular journalist. He fell short in many things which a writer more fortunately placed would have acquired as a matter of course; in the finer requirements of craftsmanship, in a sense of the duties and prerogatives of an artist, in the niceties of good taste. As to the last, his prejudices and misplaced admirations, the false sentiment, the vulgarity

and garishness, were as dear to him as the great and sterling qualities of the genius which he knew he possessed. It was an age of emotionalism, and overworked pathos was the fashion. Dickens was the man in the street raised to the power of genius; and, though the likings of his public must share the responsibility, it is not to be supposed that he did not share their sentiments. Much of this jars upon a later age, and may even repel. Yet his very infirmities helped to make the greatness of Dickens: the absence of them in the very fine writer who was hailed as the second Dickens left only a William de Morgan. That of Dickens was an unchastened genius; but its strength and pre-eminence are only the more apparent. Limitations due to circumstances must be deplored. But some of the limitations were inherent in himself; and no awareness, no training, no effort on his part to rectify or allow for them, would have made much difference.

*His  
limita-  
tions*

Chief among these was his inability to see far below the outward and visible idiosyncrasies of mankind; what was said on the same deficiency in Scott applies exactly to Dickens.<sup>1</sup> On this side, no two writers are more fundamentally akin. James Oliphant put the truth rather too aggressively, and in a manner open to misunderstanding: "The prime defect of Dickens was the lack of insight into character."<sup>2</sup> Carlyle was less severe and a good deal more accurate in his famous complaint that, instead of fashioning his characters, as Shakespeare did, from the heart outwards, "your Scott fashions them from the skin inwards, never getting near the heart of them!"<sup>3</sup> And he would have said the same of Dickens. Well, there will always be these differences between even the greater delineators of the human family: those who contemplate the variegated surface and seize the features which differentiate man and man, and those who explore human nature itself, laying bare the very springs of character and action. Perhaps Shakespeare alone united the all-seeing eye and the penetrating vision which at the same time discerns the inmost life, if others have had some smaller share of this

<sup>1</sup> See Volume VI. 217-218, and *cp.* 208-209.

<sup>2</sup> *Victorian Novelists*, 33; see also above, 248.

<sup>3</sup> *Miscellanies*, vi.—"Sir Walter Scott," 69.

universalizing power. But it must be conceded that your Scott and your Dickens, although they do not expose the inner mechanism, do not often go wrong in reading the dial-face on which its workings are registered. There may be no real profundity in the portrayals of Sam Weller and Mrs Gamp; but Dickens must have thoroughly understood the subtle and tortuous mental processes going on in each case, or the immortal pair would never have risen to the full height of so many different emergencies with such uniform credit. Neither Scott nor Dickens is ever at fault when they take long enough to feel the pulse of the machine, to count minutes and seconds. If they go amiss, it is through contenting themselves with a hasty glance; or, in Dickens's case, it is when he sets the clock beforehand, and forces the machinery to work in correspondence with a predetermined plan. How much he did ignore is less apparent because of the vividness with which all the rest is given; he seizes the salient and striking with such gusto and vigour that the reader may fail to notice that the inner reality has escaped. It is just here that his grip on personality fails. The distinctions of character which stare him in the face are purely external. The deeper differences between one consciousness and another consciousness are a sealed book to Dickens. He knows there is the deeper difference and the deeper affinity; but he cannot put his finger on the place and show what it really amounts to. It was a fault often observed in his readings, or rather in his acting of scenes from his novels, that "he isolated his parts too sharply."<sup>1</sup> He isolated them in his mind; he could not help it. To him, humanity consisted of an infinite number of individuals, all different, and it was this multifariousness that absorbed his whole attention. His characters do not react upon each other; in truth, they do not act at all, they only behave, and show off their unlikeness one to the other. Scott, at any rate, did not view his dramatis personæ in this isolating fashion; he had a firm grasp of personal relations, in spite of his lack of the deeper insight; he planted his men and women on the solid earth in a manner

<sup>1</sup> Ward, 154.

that was a stumbling-block to Dickens. Or was it no stumbling-block at all, and did Dickens voluntarily and deliberately eschew such realism? That is a question which admits of only one answer; but in a few moments it must be discussed. Meanwhile, it is obvious that the romancer was the better realist, kept closer to the life that is, whether he was depicting the remote past or his own day.

*Taine's  
criticism*

In a celebrated passage of his history of English literature, Taine complained of the static and undramatic nature of Dickens's characters. Pecksniff was a mask, not a man, though the mask was so grotesque that it would do a public service by diminishing the number of hypocrites. Dickens, he said, began with a book of essays, and his novels are only essays stitched together into a series. His characters do not grow and change, as they would if presented as living wholes. They have no history.<sup>1</sup> Taine does not mention *Great Expectations*, the only possible exception to his sweeping generalization. Pip has a history, although he hardly makes history, leaving the rest of the characters exactly as he found them, apart from events which he does not direct. But even Pip is no exception, or a very doubtful one, to the rule that the Dickens characters behave but do not act. Dickens pretended to make them act, to form purposes and carry them out, for example in the case of Uriah Heep and Mr Micawber. But who believes in Uriah's deep-laid scheme for ruining Mr Wickfield and getting the business into his own hands, or in the counterplotting of Mr Micawber which checkmates his villainy? It is the same with Jonas Chuzzlewit, with Mr Carker, and anyone else represented as carrying out some nefarious or benevolent enterprise or intrigue; they prove, on the slightest scrutiny, to be sheer impostors, mere puppets, shifted about to suit the exigencies of the plot. They and the rest of the company had to be shown performing their antics; and this was all that the elaborate plots were of service for, though Dickens would never have admitted it even to himself. It is the reason for his big scenes, which brought together a picturesque diversity of characters, their

<sup>1</sup> v., sec. 21 (p. 48).

oddities in the most piquant contrast, but with a singular absence of dramatic interaction. Admittedly, in this plot business he was conforming to custom; he submitted to the tyranny of a convention: hence his melodramatic complexities, with their mysteries to be solved and wrongs righted, sinners to be reformed or hanged, deserving young men and women to be married, and friends of the happy pair to be pensioned off. It was hybridizing the novel of character with a genre entirely foreign and irrelevant. But his readers liked it<sup>1</sup>; and there are still deluded worshippers, with an infallible instinct for the wrong thing, who admire these ingenious constructions and think them worthy of careful study.<sup>2</sup> Thackeray was so far from liking the plot nonsense, or submitting to the predilections of readers, that he went to the other extreme and abandoned plot altogether; no doubt, this was one reason why he was so long making his due impression on the public, and why he probably never will be as popular as Dickens.

But merely to think of Thackeray in conjunction with *Dickens's* Dickens is to raise the question whether Dickens was a realist "*realism*" at all. On the one hand, he achieved the most graphic picture ever painted of the life that he knew, and in parts of his novels and in the whole of some of them the picture is faithful and unexaggerated. *Pickwick*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations* are the truest version extant of life in general in his early and middle days; and *Dombey and Son* is far from being a failure in the attempt to present the well-to-do mercantile and professional classes. But at his most characteristic the picture is not merely heightened and exaggerated, it is fantastic. And yet there is no reason for quarrelling with historians of the novel who make him take his place in "the realistic reaction," and point to his richness of descriptive detail, based upon what he actually knew, as "one aspect of

<sup>1</sup> Mr Bernard Darwin (59), *à propos* of *Master Humphrey's Clock*, lays stress on Dickens's anxiety to please his readers, to give the public what it wanted, even sometimes at the expense of altering a story actually in hand.

<sup>2</sup> *Edwin Drood* seems to have superseded the missing-word competition for some enthusiasts, and any of the less coherent plots can provide as good amusement as any cross-word puzzle. Dickens ought still to be popular.



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his realism." <sup>1</sup> Everything he wrote was, at all events, founded in the world of actuality. But the circumstance that realistic fiction, especially in the extreme form aiming at the closest representation of the facts of existence called naturalism, has taken low life as its special object, gives fallacious colour to the view that Dickens must straightway be put among the realists. As a whole, his picture is not like the life that people are familiar with. The world he sets before his readers is a world of his own imagination.

*Realism  
as a  
device  
for sub-  
stantiat-  
ing  
fantasies*

This term, realism, is used in two very different senses, which must not be loosely interchanged, as one is apt to do in dealing with Dickens. Depicting things as they are or as they appear, is the commoner of those senses. Realism in the other sense is the art of making anything that may be imagined look real; it may even make the impossible seem probable. Dickens has most of this second kind of realism. The typical "character out of Dickens" is such a shape as Sam Weller, Mr Mantalini, Pecksniff, Mr Micawber, Quilp, Dick Swiveller, the Marchioness, Joe Gargery; some may have been drawn from the life without much alteration, but none of them resemble the people that might be met with any day, such people as Barnes Newcome, Blanche Amory, "the Campaigner," Captain Rawdon Crawley, or the more remarkable Sir Pitt Crawley, Major Pendennis, or Becky Sharp, every one only too true. It is not satisfactory to suppose they are caricatures, as has already been pointed out; they are not even recognizable. And creations of this order are not merely salient and occasional; they appear in crowds. Several of his novels are thickly peopled with oddities and eccentrics, grotesque or absurd beings, freaks of nature and freaks of art, who all have a life of their own though they are not like anything in ordinary experience. They are, in short, beings he has made for his own delight; and many are creations of a bold and unconstrained fancy rejoicing in the grotesque. Dickens may have seen their originals; he himself may even have seen them exactly as they are drawn, for the world to him was alive with such captivating absurdities. They are none the

<sup>1</sup> Cross, 191.

less new creations. Perhaps he saw fantastically, with a transfiguring eye that worked some change in them at the very moment of their perception. There is reason to believe that it was so, since he could not himself distinguish between his own creations and those from whom they were drawn. Possibly he was not fully aware even of the difference between these genuine poetic creations and the shoddy things which he manufactured to work the mechanical show. In his blend of prose and fantasy, he himself, perhaps, least of all knew where lay the dividing-line.

However they may have originated, these imaginative figures *His* are substantiated by their own dramatic integrity and by the *creative* potent engine of his realistic art, the Defoe-like accumulation *fertility* of detail, true as eyesight, and the harmonious, if sometimes stagy, atmosphere which is evolved from his vivid though it may be visionary picturing of their surroundings. Ultimately, all partake of a certain reality, all become more than probable; they are. And, after all, Mrs Gamp and Sam Weller, not to speak of Pip and David Copperfield, are inherently nothing like so improbable as Charles Dickens. His fertility in creations that have this durable substance extorts the comparison with Shakespeare:

"If it come to the mere wonder-work of genius—the creation of men and women, on a page of paper, who are actually more real to us than our daily acquaintances, as companionable in a crowd as even our best selected friends, as individual as the most eccentric we know, yet as universal as humanity itself, I do not see what English writer we can choose to put second to Shakespeare save Charles Dickens." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Charles Dickens and other Victorians*, by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, 20. There is nothing to cavil at seriously here except the clause "as universal as humanity itself." The view taken above is that these creations are Dickensian and anything but universal.

## CHAPTER VII

### THACKERAY

*Dickens  
and  
Thack-  
eray*

IN the third and last of Thackeray's great society novels, *The Newcomes*, Mrs Laura Pendennis says to her husband, who here impersonates the author, "People say you are always sneering, Arthur: but I know my husband better. We know papa better, don't we, baby?" '(Here my wife kisses the infant Pendennis with great effusion, who has come up dancing on his nurse's arms.)'<sup>1</sup> In these few words, Mrs Laura pits against each other two old-fashioned views of Thackeray: the one, held by most simple-minded, sentimental folk of anyone more unprejudiced and having a keener sense of humour than themselves, that he must be an unfeeling scoffer, if not a misanthrope; the other, apparently endorsed by Thackeray, that he atones for all shortcomings by his warm championship of the domestic virtues. Accusations of cynicism had too often fallen on his ears, and this was not the first time he had found it necessary to explain himself, though the explanation offered was neither adequate nor true. Mockery, and even what looked suspiciously like sneering, had been large ingredients in most of the things he had written before the novels, and were to be found in these also by any who looked for it. To tell the truth, his derisive laughter at sentiments and attitudes and fellow-writers generally esteemed had militated seriously against his popularity, and was now his chief handicap in any competition with Dickens, one year his junior but ten years his senior as a novelist. He and Dickens were inevitably held up for comparison, usually to the disadvantage of Thackeray, and they are still commonly pitted against each other. They were the two biggest luminaries in the sky at that moment, and invited the same

<sup>1</sup> lvi.

comparison as Fielding and Richardson before them, or Meredith and Hardy some time later, although in a longer view any close collation is seen to be absurd.<sup>1</sup> They were, indeed, such opposites in most things of importance that it was only, as it were, by calling into action two different lobes of the brain that one could read and fully appreciate both. It was a contrast, not only between writers, but also between readers. The world depicted by Thackeray was a different world from that of Dickens, and Thackeray's public was by no means the Dickens public. The contrast is deep and permanent, so that even to-day the ardent Dickensian cannot read Thackeray; though, happily, the converse is not true.<sup>2</sup> Dickens wrote for the common man, and voiced the sentiments of the common world; he was "the man in the street raised to the power of genius." In the battle of life he was one of the fighters; whatever the question, he always took sides. Thackeray was in the conflict and yet above it, a sympathizing spectator rather than a combatant. On the whole, he preserved his detachment and his judgment, though not always his calm; he was far too sensitive not to feel the wounds, and contemplated the struggle with pitying, disillusioned eyes. But, as an artist, or rather as an anxious and compassionate observer expressing his feelings and judgments in the established literary forms, he held himself under control, and had perfect control of his art, which was never the case with Dickens.

For Thackeray, a man of wide culture, was from his youth up saturated with the urbane, reflective spirit of the eighteenth-century classics, and had learned to scan the human spectacle from the same serene standpoint.<sup>3</sup> He had little patience with the elaborate euphemisms and thrilling idealizations of the romantic school; he found his proper range and orbit in reverting decisively to older standards of veracity, of seeing

<sup>1</sup> Las Vergnas has some amusing but very sensible remarks on this inevitable association of ideas, and on the propriety of a comparison between the two as a point of departure for the study of Thackeray (32-33).

<sup>2</sup> "The dish which one man devours, another dislikes" (*Roundabout Essays*—"De finibus").

<sup>3</sup> See Lewis Melville (i. 176) on his reading of these at Charterhouse, ages before the famous lectures on the eighteenth-century humorists.

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*The  
influence  
of the  
eighteenth-  
century  
essayists  
fundamental*

things as they are and representing them with candour and honesty.<sup>1</sup> In his earliest sketches, stories, and satires, in his journalism and in the novels of his maturity, he is the moral philosopher, surveying life with a critical and wistful eye, and expounding his judgments as Steele and Goldsmith and Addison expounded theirs. For it was the essayists, even more than Fielding and Smollett, who were his teachers and models, and from whom he imbibed the ruminating, admonitory tone which is constantly breaking in, even at the most dramatic moments of his narrative. There is a general identity of content, though a difference of form, in his fiction and in his essays, roundabout or other. Many of the latter are composed of fiction, or reminiscence that is truer only in the narrowest sense, and of comment and reverie. Now he is telling a story, now he is musing upon what he has just told. Now he tells a little story to exemplify a truth. The two elements are mixed in different proportions: this is the essential difference between his novels and his essays. Hence his novels are packed with what the fastidious critic condemns as foreign matter; they are an offence to the stickler for pure art. Surely, says the critic, it is nothing less than scandalous that a novelist should ignore the rules of dramatic representation, tear a hole in the impalpable screen which, as every right-minded person agrees, must hang between the world of the senses and the world of the imagination; should thrust himself in among the characters, and calmly declare that he would like to shake hands with them as men and brethren.<sup>2</sup> And yet, why should the man of letters be deprived of the right to choose the manner in which he will deliver his goods? Cannot a novelist be allowed to determine for himself the form of his presentation, the framing, the point of view? Thackeray did not bother about the question; he simply chose his own method, and let

<sup>1</sup> "I ask you to believe that this person writing strives to tell the truth. If there is not that, there is nothing" (Preface to *Pendennis*).

<sup>2</sup> "And, as we bring our characters forward, I will ask leave, as a man and a brother, not only to introduce them, but occasionally to step down from the platform, and talk about them: if they are good and kindly, to love them and shake them by the hand; if they are silly, to laugh at them confidentially in the reader's sleeve; if they are wicked and heartless, to abuse them in the strongest terms which politeness admits of" (*Vanity Fair*, viii.).

the critics fume. This peremptory and deliberate act of settling his own canons is open to discussion; but, at any rate, in considering his work, it must always be remembered that it is the discursive essayist, with satire as one of his prerogatives, who is in question as much as the novelist. Thackeray adopted the attitude of Goldsmith and Steele, and, to such an extent as served his purpose, he adopted their methods. And it may reasonably be contended, not merely that his summaries and reflections are as interesting and valuable as what is more strictly the story, but, further, that they enhance the verisimilitude and dramatic force of the story itself.<sup>1</sup>

The crucial events in the life of William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) are too well known to need much recapitulation, especially as the gist of them appears in the careers of Philip Firmin, Clive Newcome, and Arthur Pendennis. Born at Calcutta, of a family of Yorkshiremen which had given a number of its sons to the Indian service, he was brought to England at the age of six, on the death of his father, and five years later was sent to school at Charterhouse. That old foundation, then still in the City, figures repeatedly in his novels and stories, although the novelist did not look back upon his schooldays with unmixed regret. Thackeray was short-sighted, rather given to idleness, and did not care for games. He was the "lazy idle boy" of one of the *Roundabout Papers*. But he was a great reader, and kept up the habit at Cambridge. He did not stay out the course at the university; but he acquired such an education at school and college as, for a man of English letters, could surely not have been bettered. It is significant that he hoped to be able to "think in Greek."<sup>2</sup> Actually, he did not go far in that language; but his Latin was better, and none but the pedantic ignoramus would deny the felicity with which his classical tags and versicles come into his prose without in the least impairing its Englishness. Still a great reader, he took a leading part among the undergraduates who interested themselves in literature; there was an essay club to which

<sup>1</sup> This is shown in great detail, in the case of *Vanity Fair*, by Ludwig Baucke, in *Die Erzählkunst in Thackeray's "Vanity Fair."*

<sup>2</sup> Melville, i. 49.

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he belonged, a short-lived weekly, *The Snob*,<sup>1</sup> to which he contributed, followed by *The Gownsmen*, some work of his in which is extant; and when he left Cambridge he had made there or elsewhere a choice circle of friends several of whom were to be eminent in Victorian life and letters. He now spent the best part of a year in Germany, and took chambers in the Temple on his return with a view to reading law. But on coming of age he gave this up, and for a while stood hesitating between journalism and art. Thackeray had some money to begin with; but in the course of a few years his small fortune disappeared, partly through the monetary reverses of his stepfather, Colonel Carmichael-Smyth, whose character and unhappy connexion with an Indian bank corroborate the belief that he was the original of Colonel Newcome. A Liberal newspaper, the *National Standard*, partly financed by his stepfather, for which Thackeray was Paris correspondent, came to a speedy end; it was the same with the *Constitutional*, started a little later, on the strength of his engagement with which Thackeray had married. He had no better luck with his second string. He published a little collection of semi-satirical sketches, *Flore et Zéphyr*; but it brought him nothing. He was no draughtsman; and, though the illustrations with which he afterwards adorned his works are invaluable as showing what was his own visual idea of his characters, they look poor against the average work of such professionals as Leech and Doyle. Thackeray, now a father, was in a still more serious position than Philip, in his last novel, when after the flight of Dr Firmin it comes out that the thirty thousand pounds has vanished. But, like Prince Giglio, in *The Rose and the Ring*, who with the loss of his splendid prospects began to develop his talents and from a butterfly turned into a man of action, Thackeray was now to prove that the loss of his fortune was a blessing in disguise. Thrown on his own resources, he saw that his means of livelihood must be literature, with art not much more than a recreation. He had to face

<sup>1</sup> The word "snob" was not used in the esoteric sense which is now the accepted one; it meant a townsman as distinguished from a gownsmen. The sub-title ran, "a literary and scientific journal *not* conducted by members of *the University*" (Melville, i. 54).

drudgery and inadequate pay for some years to come. But, though he was a long time yet realizing that his proper vocation was the novel, and though through his careless use of many different pen-names, M. A. Titmarsh, Jeames de la Pluche, Ikey Solomons junior, Fitz-Boodle, Spec, Snob, and Policeman X, he failed to impress his personality on the public, he was unconsciously preparing himself to write novels.<sup>1</sup>

At first a free-lance, Thackeray soon became a regular "*Fraser's* contributor to *Fraser's Magazine*, and came under the powerful Maginn, whose airs of intellectual superiority, <sup>zine</sup>" his jaunty wit and devil-may-care truculence, appear to have been only too congenial to the still youthful Thackeray. *The Yellowplush Correspondence*, *Catherine*, *Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*, and *Barry Lyndon* were his most considerable works for *Fraser*, and fairly represent the stages in his growing mastery of the art of fiction. Later he was attached to *Punch*, where among numerous minor pieces appeared the material that presently made up *The Book of Snobs*, another landmark. Some odds and ends older even than his *Fraser* period have historical interest, for example, *The Professor*, a *Tale of Sentiment*, which came out originally in *Bentley's Miscellany* (1837) and four years later went into the *Comic Tales and Sketches*, edited and illustrated by Michael Angelo Titmarsh (1841). This story of the school-miss in love with the dancing-master, who palms himself off on the young innocent as the noble and heroic Dandolo, driven from Venice by the "Prussian" conquerors, might have been taken for a realistic skit on the sentimental romanticism of L.E.L., Thomas Moore, or Bulwer-Lytton, by another Theodore Hook. Thackeray had parodied Hook, crudely enough, in the letters in *The Gownsmen* with the signature "Dorothea Julia Ramsbottom." The exceedingly low comedy of the conclusion, when Dandolo engulfs an enormous supper at the establishment of Adeliza's parents, and confronted by the enormous bill, announces, "I never pay—I'm Dando!" is Theodore with a notable difference. It is a clear instance of

<sup>1</sup> "Unlike his great rival, he had learnt his art before he began to practise it" (W. E. Henley: *Views and Reviews*—"Thackeray").



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the studied bathos which was to be Thackeray's sign-manual in many sardonic sketches, not to speak of ironic situations in his novels.<sup>1</sup> Thackeray exposed another vein which he was to work assiduously later in *The Fatal Boots*, the autobiography of a swindling, sneaking scoundrel, an unspeakable rogue, but not quite of the same measure as Mr Deuceace, Barry Lyndon, or Barnes Newcome, who, in fact, writes himself down an ass, and cannot see the moral of the pleasing but incredible poetic justice that falls upon him at last. The tale has some ugly touches, uglier perhaps than that of Mr Deuceace, and is undignified by the least trace of tragedy. The irony is finer in the little comedy of love, political intrigue, and mean social ambition, *The Bedford-Row Conspiracy*, the plot of which was confessedly borrowed from Charles de Bernard. Here is a foretaste of his satire of snobbery, the patriotic William Pitt Scully, Liberal M.P., impassioned denouncer of tyranny, jobbery, and plunder of the commonalty, being beguiled from his rigid principles by the blandishments of the aristocratic Lady Gorgon.

"*The  
Yellow-  
plush  
Papers*"

There are two sets of *Yellowplush Papers*; the author of *The Memoirs of Mr C. J. Yellowplush*, though also a footman and addicted to comic spelling, the framing of neat aphorisms, and satire at the expense of Sawedwadgeorgeearlittbulwig, is not quite the same individual as he of *The Diary of C. Jeames de la Pluche*. The implicit object of the satire in both cases, however, was "the fashnable novvles"; first and foremost, the novels that toyed with vice and crime. Lytton comes in for many hard knocks from both worthies. Jeames de la Pluche, the enriched footman, who has made his money by gambling with shares during the railway mania, avows that "in horder to give myself a hideer of what a gentleman reely is, I've read the novvle of 'Pelham' six times, and am to go through it 4 times mor." But the richest satire is in

<sup>1</sup> Dibelius hits the nail on the head this time in comparing such things in Hook as Mrs Fuggleston's poetic flights and collapse into drab commonplace with this more artistic tendency in Thackeray: "I delight in the sea; there is something so vast, so mighty, in the wild expanse, at times so still, at others so impetuous. It is, indeed, magnificent; and then, in dull weather, when the billows break upon the beach, it always reminds me of a bottle of ginger beer 'well up'" (*Gervase Skinner*).

Mr Yellowplush's hilarious "Ajew," where he has a heart-to-heart talk with the great man:

"Oh, sir," says I, "I knows what's what; don't send me away. I know them littery chaps, and, beleave me, I'd rather be a footman. The work's not so hard—the pay is better: the vittles incompyrably supearor. I have but to clean my things, and run my errints, and you put clothes on my back, and meat in my mouth. Sir! Mr Bullwig! an't I right? shall I quit *my* station and sink—that is to say, rise—to *yours*?"

Bullwig was violently affected; a tear stood in his glistening i. "Yellowplush," says he, seizing my hand, "*you are* right. Quit not your present occupation; black boots, clean knives, wear plush, all your life, but don't turn literary man. Look at me. I am the first novelist in Europe. I have ranged with eagle wing over the wide regions of literature, and perched on every eminence in its turn. I have gazed with eagle eyes on the sun of philosophy, and fathomed the mysterious depths of the human mind. . . . Oh," said Bullwig, clasping his hands, and throwing his fine i's up to the chandelier, "The curse of Pwometheus descends upon his wace. Wath and punishment pursue them from genewation to genewation! Wo to genius, the heaven-scaler, the fire-stealer! Wo and thrice bitter desolation. . . . And you, Yellowplush, would penetwate these mystewies; you would waise the awful veil, and stand in the twemendous Pwesence. Beware; as you value your peace, beware! Withdraw, wash Neophyte! For heaven's sake—O for heaven's sake!"—here he looked round with agony—"give me a glass of bwandy-and-water, for this clawet is beginning to disagwee with me."

In the first story by Mr Yellowplush, "Miss Shum's Husband," the bathos dear to Thackeray arrives in the form of a surprise. The opulent and stylish Mr Altamont, whose own wife does not know where his money comes from or where he goes every morning at ten to drive back as regularly at six in the evening, turns out at last to be he that "sweep the crossing from the Bank to Cornhill!!" Very different are the surprises in the history of that portentous scoundrel, Mr Deuceace, for whom the blackleg, Captain Rook, who

plucks Mr Pigeon in one of the "Character Sketches,"<sup>1</sup> had been a very mild preparation. Thackeray could not away with Lytton's foppish Pelhams, supposed to conceal, under a rakish air of wit and levity, the mind of a philosopher and the noble ambition of a statesman. Gentlemen-highwaymen, like Paul Clifford, or blameless murderers, like Eugene Aram, provoked his frank disgust. Hence his counter-portraits: such as this of the Hon. Mr Deuceace, and then of Catherine Hayes, Barry Lyndon, and their similes in the novels, down to the Rev. Tufton Hunt, in *Philip*, all as different from each other as the honest people, yet all of the same ugly stamp. As Mr Yellowplush puts it:

"If he had been a common man, you'd have said he was no better than a swinler. It's only rank and buth that can warrant such singularities as my master show'd. For it's no use disgysing it—the Honrable Halgernon was a GAMBLER. For a man of vulgar family, it's the wust trade that can be—for a man of common feelinx of honesty, this profession is quite imposbil; but for a real thoroughbread genlmmn, it's the esiest and most prophetable line he can take."

The ingenious story of the overreaching of this ingenious and unscrupulous scamp by his more ingenious and unscrupulous father, the Earl of Crabs, with the ghastly finale, when the brute, with his mutilated arm, turns on the wretched woman whom he had married for a fortune of which he had been balked, is recounted by the well-trained flunkey with hardly a lapse into feeling. But Mr Yellowplush, who looks on without moving a muscle at the doings of the rest, notices that Miss Kicksey, whom he had not mentioned before, "she was less than nothink in our house," went up to the poor deluded Mrs Deuceace at once, and held out her arms—"she had a heart, that old Kicksey, and I respect her for it." It intensifies the grimness and throws up the callous brutality of these people whom the romancers had painted in such different colours. The satire was approximating to the irony of *Jonathan Wild*; Thackeray must have been learning from

<sup>1</sup> These appeared a little later; but "Captain Rook and Mr Pigeon" certainly looks like a more prosaic study for the doings of Deuceace, and may have been the earlier written.

Fielding, and for a young man of twenty-seven had certainly developed a firm hand.

Mr Yellowplush was, of course, a reviewer, and his criticisms in "Fashnable Fax and Polite Annygoats" are double-edged. What does the writer on conduct and etiquette mean by "a graceful carriage"? "We at once asked Jim Coachman; but neither he nor his helpers could help us. Jim thinks it was a baroosh; cook says a brisky; Sam, the stable-boy (who, from living chiefly among the hosses and things, has got a sad low way of talking), said it was all dicky, and bid us drive on to the nex' page." But it crops up anew.

"There it is, the carriage again! But never mind that—to the nex sentence it's nothink: 'to sit with ease and grace must be enthroned in the mind's eye on every virtuous sentiment!' Heaven bless your bones, Mr Skeleton! <sup>1</sup> where are you driving us? I say, this sentence would puzzle the very Spinx himself! How *can* a man sit in his eye?"

"The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan," which appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine*, are as brilliant an exhibition of Irish humour as of Thackeray's ability to out-Munchausen Munchausen, as he was to do with a finer point to his humour in "A Legend of the Rhine," which shows all the difference between uproarious burlesque and the romantic extravaganza that verges on poetry. But in *Catherine*, which "a *rine*" first appeared in *Fraser* (1839-1840), he turned again to "a *rine*" scene of unmixed rascality performed by persons who never deviate into good feeling," as another counterblast to the Newgate school of fiction.<sup>2</sup>

The public will hear of nothing but rogues; and the only way in which poor authors, who must live, can act honestly by the public and themselves, is to paint such thieves as they are: not dandy, poetical, rose-water thieves; but real down-right scoundrels, leading scoundrelly lives, drunken, profligate, dissolute, low; as scoundrels will be. They don't quote Plato, like Eugene Aram; or live like gentlemen, and sing the

<sup>1</sup> John Henry Skelton, author of *My Book, or the Anatomy of Conduct* (1837).

<sup>2</sup> Elwin has a good page (88-89) on the furore raised by *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram*, *Oliver Twist*, and "the most popular of all Newgate novels," Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*, at this very time.

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pleasantest ballads in the world, like jolly Dick Turpin; or prate eternally about τὸ καλόν, like that precious canting Maltravers, whom we all of us have read about and pitied; or die like whitewashed saints, like poor "Miss Dadsy" in *Oliver Twist*.

Accordingly, he seeks his example of "vice, agreeable vice," in the historical case of a woman who murdered her husband, "under very revolting circumstances," and was burned at Tyburn in 1726; and relates her history with, so far as possible, the same imperturbable face as Yellowplush had shown in telling the tale of Mr Deuceace. But Thackeray did not succeed in maintaining the required tone right to the end. He put too much of the regular novel into what should have been the cool relation of a detestable history; and, in fact, this is his nearest approximation so far to the dimensions and general manner of a novel. Even so, it seems to have been too strong meat for those days of sentiment.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps his readers did not like so many heavy tirades against Dickens, Lytton, and Co.; and the public would not have been flattered at being told that they were "gorged with blood and foul Newgate garbage." Thackeray was better advised when he took the line of uncompromising irony in *Barry Lyndon*, and still better when he turned Lytton's heroics into a shrieking absurdity in "George de Barnwell."

"*The  
Paris  
Sketch  
Book*"

The manner of the novelist is to the fore in Thackeray's three travel-books, the first and liveliest of which was *The Paris Sketch Book* (1840)—his first real book. It begins with what was to be a frequent episode in his novels, the crossing, the landing, and the arrival at Paris, the fellow-travellers and the wayside incidents being sketched with agreeable wit and humour. The rest is a miscellany: magazine articles, some of them actual reprints, on French painting, French novels and plays, George Sand and the fashionable disciples of her pantheism, regarded from a very insular point of view, and

<sup>1</sup> No doubt, Lewis Melville is right in arguing that Thackeray put too much intellect into these early works, running counter to the prevailing tastes of the mob: "It seems that he had not quite grasped the fact that there are things other than folly or knavery to write about, and that a surfeit of rogues has an unpleasant after-effect" (i. 195-200).

a number of stories, mostly borrowed. He scolds Madame Sand for her "topsyturvyfication of morality" in *Lélia*, tears to pieces the vague theosophy unfolded in *Spiridion*, admires her prose and her narrative style, translating some of it in a manner that does full justice to its beauty, and ends with a sneer at the futility of it all:

The leaves of the Diderot and Rousseau tree have produced this goodly fruit: here it is, ripe, bursting, and ready to fall;—and how to fall? Heaven send that it may drop easily, for all can see that the time is come.

In short, the French novelist is bracketed with those among the English whose deleterious doctrines dismayed him. The most caustic of his moralizing homilies is the last, "Meditations at Versailles," in which he scolds and berates Louis XIV in the same fashion as he did George IV twenty years later. In both cases he omits everything that can be said in defence or extenuation. His gibes at the "majesty made out of the wig, the high-heeled shoes, and cloak, all fleurs-de-lis bespangled," and the greatness which is but the creation of subservience and adulation, have served so long as powder and shot for the assassins of royalty that they are growing tiresome. What moved Thackeray's ire was the slavishness, the cringing; in fine, the snobbishness. This is the point of the anecdote of the great Elliston, playing George IV at Drury Lane, and so carried away by the applause and his own unction that he "burst into tears, and, spreading out his arms, exclaimed: 'Bless ye, bless ye, my people!' Don't let us laugh at his Ellistonian majesty, nor at the people who clapped hands and yelled 'bravo!' in praise of him." Louis also was only performing his part.

Next in merit, or superior, are the little stories, told in his *The* best and tersest manner. "A Caution to Travellers" is *inset* reminiscent of Deuceace: the silly commercial traveller, the *stories* snobbish Pogson, is inveigled and pillaged by the soi-disant baroness, her soi-disant husband, and the notorious Earl of Cinqbars, and got out of the mess by Major British, who receives his fulsome acknowledgments with the contempt

they deserve. "A Gambler's Death" is a neat little morality, without too much effusion of tears. Good grotesques are "The Painter's Bargain" and "The Devil's Wager." In the first, the Devil catches a Tartar, and gets off ignominiously; but, alas! it is only a dream. In the other, also, Satan is dished. "Cartouche" is a witty version of a picaresque story much older than Defoe, who had told it already. Then there are two that would have suited Dickens. "Beatrice Merger" has a regular Dickensian go at the big-wigs; and "Mary Ancel," which is partly historical and partly from Nodier, would have made a capital garnish to the *Tale of Two Cities*, with the Jacobin scoundrel who wrings Mary's father's consent to their marriage by the threat of the guillotine. But the public executioner, always blubbing over "The Sorrows of Werther," is very Thackerayan.

"*The Irish Sketch Book*" and "*Cornhill to Grand Cairo*" Although *The Irish Sketch Book* (1843) bore the name of M. A. Titmarsh on the title-page, the dedication to Lever was signed by Thackeray, who ought to have taken this wise precaution sooner. He made the recognized tour, with much more, however, than the customary leisuredness; and, whilst the novelist's eye is again evident, there is also a very English eye for Irish insouciance, and, of course, moralizing at every halt, and even without halting. Thackeray picked up his local colour on this journey for "David Haggarty's Wife," and other scenes and stories. As to the scenery, he restrained his transports, if he felt any; and says, with reference to the Vale of Avoca, "It is vain to attempt to describe natural beauties," dryly adding, "(though this is a minor consideration), we did not go thither." He is at his best in recalling how he summoned up a proper sense of awe in approaching the Giant's Causeway, the onslaught of the guides, the boat, the sea-sickness, and the rapture of getting back to dinner; but for the Causeway itself—"the barge moored at Hungerford Market is a more majestic object." Thackeray was a philistine, and the conducted tour described in *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (1845) was a philistine's progress from the amenities of London and club-land to regions beyond the confines of the civilized world. Athens disappointed him.

"I swear solemnly that I would rather have two hundred a year in Fleet Street, than be King of the Greeks, with Basileus written before my name round their beggarly coin; with the bother of perpetual revolutions in my huge plaster of Paris palace." At Constantinople, the only object of his expatiation is a Turkish bath; and it is evident he tried in vain to conjure up the appropriate feelings at Jerusalem. It is much the same with the "Little Travels and Roadside Sketches," which appeared about this time in *Fraser's Magazine*. Even in questions of art, one of his own subjects, he shows himself at Antwerp, very erratic in his appreciation of Rubens, and at Bruges has little to say about the painter whom he always calls "Hemling." In the last section, however, which is about his trip to Waterloo, he is at ease, almost as much so as in a roundabout paper.

Thackeray had begun *A Shabby-Genteel Story* in *Fraser* (1840), "*A* and made an abrupt end of it at the time of Mrs Thackeray's *Shabby-disastrous illness*; in later life he was to pick up the threads *Genteel again*, rather uncertainly, in *Philip*. It promised, better *Story*" perhaps than anything yet written, to be an amusing novel, a true novel, and more than merely amusing. Though Caroline is hardly recognizable as the same person as that dear little soul, the Little Sister, of *Philip*, she was at any rate more than an outline; and the other inmates of the Margate lodging-house, Mrs Gann, whose deterioration into a mean domestic vixen is well though summarily traced, the down-trodden second husband who finds complete solace in his pipe and beer, and the two other daughters, the vulgar, flirtatious offspring of Ensign Macarty, killed at Waterloo, bullying this household Cinderella, Gann's daughter Caroline, are well cut out for the ironical comedy. This changes presently into roaring farce, with the rivalry of the flamboyant sentimental painter, Andrea Fitch,<sup>1</sup> and the lodger, Brandon—Brandon who is here a dark horse, and is considerably modified before he appears in the later book as Dr Firmin. The farce culminates in the burlesque duel, when it is found that the

<sup>1</sup> Fitch might have been drawn from Haydon, whose monstrous historical canvases Thackeray made fun of in "Picture Gossip."



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pistols had not been charged, the invincible courage of Caroline's two adorers had been thrown away, and the affair is turned into a public spectacle by the arrival of a crowd of spectators, headed by the amorous Mrs Carrickfergus—Thackeray's magnificent bathos again. Several of these oddities, together with the foolish lordling Cinqbars and the raffish Tufthunt, are such as Dickens would have rejoiced in; but Thackeray gives them a history, Dickens would have been contented to "film" them.

"*The  
Great  
Hoggarty  
Dia-  
mond*"

Dickens is brought to mind again in *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*, which appeared next year in *Fraser*, the humorous and touching domestic story being bound up with the account of the Napoleonic promoter, Mr Brough, and the bubble companies which crash and involve the unwary Titmarsh in imprisonment for other people's debts. It is all very like Dickens's side-hits at contemporary scandals. But, though Thackeray caricatures Brough's aggressive plainness—

"I'm not ashamed—I'm not proud. Those who know John Brough, know that ten years ago he was a poor clerk like my friend Titmarsh here, and is now worth half a million"—

and though he raises expectation of a lurid exposure by calling the man a hypocrite, and dilating on the prayerful and psalm-singing regulations of his vast financial establishment, Brough is let off lightly:

I must say, to the credit of that gentleman, that while everybody thought he had run away with hundreds of thousands of pounds, he was in a garret at Boulogne, with scarce a shilling in his pocket, and his fortune to make afresh.

On the last page he pays a tribute to the man's "undaunted courage," and "can't help thinking . . . that there must be some good in him, seeing the way in which his family are faithful to him." He certainly gets better treatment than the brandy-and-water-drinking Rev. Grimes Wapshot, of the Independent Chapel, another Stiggins, who turns out to be a forger. Very likely, Thackeray had the financial misfortunes of himself and his stepfather at the back of his mind in all

this business; those recollections were to be more in the front when he wrote *The Newcomes*. All the rest is a very pretty tale of love and domesticity on the edge of catastrophe, a theme on which variations were to be played as late as *Philip on his Way through the World*, that funny talisman, the Diamond, performing the fairy part in a novel of real life as impudently as if this were *The Rose and the Ring*. Sam's unexpected adventures in the most aristocratic society introduce romance, of a not too improbable kind, and some sparkling satire. But, best of all, there is a tenderness in the tale of Samuel and his bereaved little wife which is new in Thackeray, and due no doubt to his own domestic tragedy, which strikes to the heart in the scene where she goes to the great lady as wet-nurse to the son and heir:

"Poor thing!" says my lady, taking Mrs T.'s hand very kind, "she seems very young. How old are you, my dear?"

"Five weeks and two days!" says your wife, sobbing.

"Mrs Horner ('the angry and contemshious' young woman sent by the duchess) burst into a laugh; but there was a tear in my lady's eyes, for she knew what the poor thing was a-thinking of.

"Silence, woman!" says she angrily to the great grenadier-woman, and at this moment the child in the next room began crying.

As soon as your wife heard the noise, she sprung from her chair and made a step forward, and put her hands to her breast and said, "The child—the child—give it to me!" and then began to cry again.

My lady looked at her for a moment, and then ran into the next room and brought her the baby; and the baby clung to her as if he knew her: and a pretty sight it was to see that dear woman with the child at her bosom.

Altogether, *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* is a miniature, though still only a miniature, of Thackeray at his most accomplished. His advance shows most decisively if it be compared with "Cox's Diary," which had appeared just before with the title of "Barber Cox and the Cutting of his Comb," the broad history of a barber and his family who come in for a fortune, and make a terrific splash, only to be laughed at by

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the people whom they try to outdo. Then the missing will be unearthed, and they are returned whence they came. This is not a bit superior to the caricature and comic misadventures of tradition.

"*The  
Fitz-  
Boodle  
Papers*"

There is better stuff than this last in *The Fitz-Boodle Papers* and the miscellaneous items in which this supposititious club-man<sup>1</sup> has a hand, such as "Men's Wives." In his "Confessions," this gentleman makes a shrewd remark which applies to the matter in hand and also to much that was eventually coming from Thackeray:

"Many persons will call this description low; I do not envy them their gentility, and have always observed through life (as, to be sure, every other *gentleman* has observed as well as myself) that it is your *parvenu* who stickles most for what he calls the genteel, and has the most squeamish abhorrence for what is frank and natural."

It is very low comedy when Fitz-Boodle's romance with the exquisite Dorothea comes to an ignominious end with the couple sprawling on the polished floor "in the midst of the ballroom, the music going ten miles an hour, 800 pairs of eyes fixed upon us, a cursed shriek of laughter bursting out from all sides. Heavens! how clear I heard it, as we went on rolling and rolling." And low, in another sense, was Captain Fitz-Boodle's next flame, the pure Ottilia, who breaks her lover's heart by eating nine bad oysters, and asking for more. One of his best yarns, "Miss Löwe," is a burlesque of the impassioned love-tale of commerce, and another example of Thackerayan bathos, the impassioned lover discovering that Minna is the vixenish daughter of a little German-Jew tobacconist who has been sent to Coventry, and that he has proposed to and has to fight a duel on account of some low fellow's betrothed. There is, however, no duel. His second explains to Fitz-Boodle: "We were just talking matters over, when Webecca quied out, and we found her in the armth of Bwian de Bois-Guilbert here." Bois-Guilbert is appeased without bloodshed. "Bluebeard's Ghost" is one of these

<sup>1</sup> Henley calls Thackeray "the average clubman *plus* genius and style" (*Views and Reviews*—"Thackeray").

tales, an excellent transposition of the familiar legend into domestic terms, not a whit spoiled by the unmasking at the finish. Of "Men's Wives" the best are "Mr and Mrs Frank Berry" and "Dennis Haggarty's Wife," the latter almost cruel in its pathos. Mrs Haggarty is an early scion of that race of women who later yielded the Campaigner in *The Newcomes* and Mrs Baynes in *Philip*.

What myriads of souls are there of this admirable sort—selfish, stingy, ignorant, passionate, brutal; bad sons, mothers, fathers, never known to do kind actions!

These are the dullards: "Only let a man or woman have DULNESS sufficient, and they need bow to no extant authority." In such seasons of gloom as when this was written, Thackeray's vision was terribly keen. It is one of his piercing glances at the dark under-side which are more revealing than the overstrained realism of his Catherines and Deuceaces, and which have persuaded some to set him down a cynic. This is tragic; not so the drama going on at the Berrys' showy little house in the Avenue de Paris at Versailles. The account of the dinner there shows Thackeray at his best, and must not be mutilated by quotation. It was artful of him to precede the account of Berry's subjugation by his fearful wife, that anxious slave to the proprieties, with the great story of the school fight in which he had formerly licked the second cock of the school. This pair of stories show that Thackeray was entering upon his maturity.

In a novel which now appeared, first in *Fraser* (1844) as *Thackeray's* "The Luck of Barry Lyndon, a Romance of the Last Century," and then in proper book-form as *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq., written by Himself* (1844),<sup>1</sup> this maturity has arrived, or all but arrived. The only ground for the qualification is that the pose of savage irony does sometimes break down, indicating that Thackeray was not yet possessed of that perfect control characteristic of his greater novels. Everything he had written up to now had shown him to be reacting with more or less violence against nearly all the novelists considered in this

<sup>1</sup> In *Fraser* it was assigned to Fitz-Boodle.

volume and most of those in the one before, including the sentimentalists and the Gothic romancers and the exponents of doctrinaire fiction. Very soon, in the "Prize Novelists," he was to parody the romanticism of Lytton, Disraeli, Lever, G. P. R. James, Mrs Gore, and Fenimore Cooper, and to hold his hand in regard to Dickens only at the remonstrance of Mark Lemon, who would not allow such a popular favourite to be ridiculed. Scott was one of his own favourites; he loved the *Waverley Novels* as much as he loved Dumas' brilliant romances of cape and sword.<sup>1</sup> Yet the finest of all his burlesques is "Rebecca and Rowena," in which he makes fun of Scott's glorification of the Middle Ages, shows what he himself thought chivalry and feudalism really were, depicts Cœur de Lion as little better than a champion bruiser, and tells how *Ivanhoe's* love-story ought to have ended but for literary convention. The faultless Rowena turns out to be an insipid person to live with; *Ivanhoe* regretfully calls to mind the tenderness and generosity of Rebecca the Jewess, who, as Thackeray points out, is the true heroine. Without transgressing any rule of decorum, Rowena is married off to the Saxon Athelstane, and *Ivanhoe*, now middle-aged, weds his own true love. In his retort to the Newgate school, he had dealt with the flashy rhetoric and Byronic sentiment of both Harrison Ainsworth and Lytton, and what he thought of the small fry can easily be surmised. He would not have quarrelled with Peacock; but the only Peacock novel which he appears to have read was *Maid Marian*.<sup>2</sup> As to Lever, his own opinion was that the Irish novelist went wrong in "the Lorrequian cyclis of romances," with their "drums, trumpets, blunderbusses, guns, and thunder," "the rollicking and bawling and the songs of Micky Free, and the horse-racing, and punch-making, and charging, and steeple-chasing." The fundamental "quality of the Lorrequer stories seems to me to be extreme delicacy, sweetness, and kindliness of heart.

<sup>1</sup> Over which he goes into ecstasies in the *Roundabout Papers*, see "On a Peal of Bells."

<sup>2</sup> The reference is in *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* (ii.), and he may even not have read the book, though he knew the play founded on it: "a play that was all the rage then, taken from a famous story-book by one Peacock, a clerk in the India House: and a precious good place he has too."

The *spirits* are for the most part artificial, the *fond* is sadness,<sup>1</sup> as appears to me to be that of most Irish writing and people.”<sup>2</sup> Thus the works of Carleton—“and he is by far the greatest *genius* who has written of Irish life—are pre-eminently melancholy.” And “Griffin’s best novel, *The Collegians*, has the same painful character.” Even Lover is far from being a mere buffoon. The side-light these remarks throw on Thackeray himself is the important matter: whether or no his spirits are worked up artificially, again “the *fond* is sadness.”<sup>3</sup>

The masterpiece among his exposures of false ideals and “*Barry* the nonsense of romance was written in emulation of Fielding’s *Lyndon*” *History of Jonathan Wild the Great*, that sardonic study of courage, ability, and will-power, unrestrained by conscience.<sup>4</sup> *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon* (1844) are the autobiography of a thoroughpaced scoundrel, whose swaggering Irish conceit betrays his real baseness in every sentence. Strip off the romantic pretences from Harrison Ainsworth’s noble criminals, or those magnificent adventurers in whom the soul of Bulwer-Lytton delighted, show the truth of their motives and careers, and you find nothing left but a ruffian and a bully. The story of this rascal’s exploits, defeats, and successes is absorbing from start to finish. Thackeray wrote it after his tour in Ireland, and the first three chapters describing the mock-hero’s debut are by no means the least racy. Before he became a man of fortune and fashion, Barry was a private in a Prussian regiment. The unvarnished picture he presents of the atrocities, the bestiality, and the wretchedness of war, and of the intrigues and multifarious villainies going on in high places and low, is a powerful antidote to the glamour of the historical romancer:

“It is well for gentlemen to talk of the age of chivalry; but

<sup>1</sup> Cp. “Le fond de la nature thackerayenne, laquelle est toute nourrie d’aspirations romantiques” (Las Vergnas, 105).

<sup>2</sup> “A Box of Novels.”

<sup>3</sup> “The world called to him as it had done to Cruikshank, and to many others, ‘Make us laugh, or you and your children starve.’ He did his best, but he could not assume the rôle of *farceur* for very long at a time. He might be cutting the most amusing verses for the public; but generally there can be found, under the surface, a touch of pathos, or of melancholy” (Melville, i. 280).

<sup>4</sup> See Volume IV. 107–118.

remember the starving brutes whom they lead—men nursed in poverty, entirely ignorant, made to take a pride in deeds of blood—men who can have no amusement but in drunkenness, debauch, and plunder. It is with these shocking instruments that your great warriors and kings have been doing their murderous work in the world; and while, for instance, we are at the present moment admiring the ‘Great Frederick,’ as we call him, and his philosophy, and his liberality, and his military genius, I, who have served him, and been, as it were, behind the scenes of which that great spectacle is composed, can only look at it with horror. What a number of items of human crime, misery, slavery, go to form that sum-total of glory”<sup>1</sup>

No one would wish this to have remained unwritten; but it is obvious how far Thackeray was from having Fielding’s stern intellectual grip, and keeping to the ironical standpoint. Sometimes Barry writes as an out-and-out scamp without the faintest tinge of remorse; sometimes he has compunctions, and here he is seen moralizing in the voice of his author. In *Esmond*, Thackeray returned not only to the eighteenth century but also to this anti-romanticism.

*Miscellaneous  
facetiae*

Thackeray was now writing busily for *Punch*, deserting *Fraser’s Magazine*, which declined in favour during the forties, after the death of James Fraser. Most of his contributions were of a trifling and fugitive order; but, besides the “Snobs” and the “Prize Novelists,” there were a number of more substantial items. “A Little Dinner at Timmins’s” is worthy of any novelist. The would-be fashionable couple who give an ostentatious dinner far beyond their means, are let in for expenses which they had never foreseen and which take years to pay off; they offend most of those whom they do invite and all those whom they do not, forfeiting the very object for which they gave it. There is the usual sermon at the end: “Why, in fact, did the Timminses give the party at all?” etc., etc. But it is a miracle, the amount of comedy and laughter Thackeray gets out of what is only an expanded anecdote. In “Mrs Perkins’s Ball,” “Our Street,” and “Dr Birch and his Young Friends,” his vignettes of character by pen and pencil go edifyingly together. The Mulligan, who

is as good an Irishman in his irrepressible way as Captain Costigan himself, is the great figure in the first of these; and not the worst part of the school story is the jolly little romance intertwined. It is observable that Thackeray, although he laughs at clerical foibles both here and often elsewhere, as he does too at the medical profession, and lets Slocum pronounce Mr Oriel "of the Gothic pointed school" and Mr Gronow at Ebenezer "a couple of humbugs," is not blind to their virtues.

There is only one point on which, my friends, they seem agreed. Slocum likes port, but who ever heard that he neglected his poor? Gronow, if he comminates his neighbour's congregation, is the affectionate father of his own. Oriel, if he loves pointed Gothic and parched peas for breakfast, has a prodigious soup-kitchen for his poor; and as for little Father Mole, who never lifts his eyes from the ground, ask our doctor at what bedsides he finds himself, and how he soothes poverty, and braves misery and infection.

"A Legend of the Rhine," in *George Cruikshank's Table-Book* (1845), signed Theresa MacWhirter, with a possible glance at *Werther*, was a marvellous adaptation of Dumas' *Othon l'Archer*.<sup>1</sup> It is the sort of burlesque of life "many, many thousand years ago, and at the exact period when chivalry was in full bloom," which is itself brimful of the splendour and enchantment of romance, of magic and marvels, heroisms and anachronisms, to the wildest heart's content. Here is the anti-romanticism that disarms protest:

Such a hero of romance as young Otto was. Fate seems to watch over such: events occur to them just in the nick of time; they rescue virgins just as ogres are on the point of devouring them; they manage to be present at court and interesting ceremonies, and to see the most interesting people at the most interesting moment; directly an adventure is necessary for them, that adventure occurs: and I, for my part, have often wondered with delight (and never could penetrate the mystery of the subject) at the way in which that humblest of romance heroes, Signor Clown, when he wants anything in the *Pantomime*, straightway finds it to his hand.

<sup>1</sup> *Saintsbury* thought there might be a hit at Emma Robinson (see above, pp. 110). *Saintsbury's* tribute is in chap. ix., *op. cit.*



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And for first-class bathos, read how Sir Gottfried's riderless horse galloped away, up the steep mountains, through the dark pine-forests, through light and darkness, storm and sunshine,

"wildly, madly, furiously, irresistibly on! brave horse! gallant steed! snorting child of Araby! On went the horse, over mountains, rivers, turnpikes, applewomen; and never stopped until he reached a livery-stable in Cologne where his master was accustomed to put him up."

The story itself, in its glorious extravagance, is a worthy appendix or scribal epilogue to all the romances that were ever written. Thackeray, after he had achieved greatness in *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*, returned to the Rhenish country in *The Kickleburys on the Rhine* (1850), one of his *Christmas Books*, like *The Rose and the Ring* (1855); and in both he illustrated the letterpress with his own pencil. Lady Kicklebury is one of his mighty snobs; and this is no romance, but, as he put it, "a chronicle of feelings and characters," related to his sketch-books on the one hand, and to the society novels on the other. As for *The Rose and the Ring; or, the History of Prince Giglio and Prince Bulbo*, which he called "a fire-side pantomime for great and small children," it is an epic of sage buffoonery which one could only describe by relating it.

"*The  
Book of  
Snobs*"

*The Book of Snobs* (1848), composed, after some weeding out, of sketches that had appeared in *Punch* (1846-1847), is of more importance in the history of Thackeray than as a work of literature. Thackeray was not exactly the inventor of what may be termed "snobbography," nor had he the sole monopoly of the subject, though he was the one who systematized the science and the art, and was so obsessed that he ran it to death, and often dragged it in most unseasonably in his later novels. He went too far in producing a regular treatise on the subject. Dickens had brought forward, for instance, many varieties of hypocrite, but refrained from compiling a pocket-dictionary of hypocrisy. Other vices and propensities might have lent themselves just as well to

this sort of tabulation, if a satirist or social anatomist had thought such specialism worth while. Forms of snobbery, having some affinity with the malady diagnosed by Thackeray, had been detected even by such an early inquirer into social phenomena as Fanny Burney, witness the Miss Branghtons and their vulgar beau, Mr Smith. Jane Austen, also, had shown herself aware of the slaves of fashion, the pushing social aspirants, the tuft-hunters, who infested every rank above the nethermost: Thackeray would hardly have refused admission to a place in his gallery to Mr Collins or Mrs Elton. He might possibly have declared Lady Morgan a snob; yet she, too, had shown acute distaste for people with no other definite trait. Theodore Hook had made pretty fair game of this vulgarism in his toad-eaters and social climbers<sup>1</sup>; and, as early as in *Pelham*, Lytton had been down upon the "vulgarly genteel," examining the subject gravely a little later, in *England and the English*.<sup>2</sup> Disraeli's Apollonia, in *Lothair*, is post-Thackerayan<sup>3</sup>; but Mrs Guy Flouncey, in *Tancred*, was actually contemporaneous with the Snob papers in *Punch*.<sup>4</sup> Then there is Dickens, with Lord Frederick Verisopht, Sir Mulberry Hawk, and Mr Wititterly, in *Nicholas Nickleby*, going "about all day in a tremor of delight at having shaken hands with a lord, and having actually asked him to come and see him in his own house"; with his denunciation of pride and arrogance in *Dombey and Son*, his satire of social pretensions in *Our Mutual Friend*, and gently ironical censure of Pip in *Great Expectations*. But the angle of his vision was not the same as Thackeray's; he hated snobbery and any form of class prejudice because it was a trespass against the human solidarity which was his ideal.<sup>5</sup>

Thackeray said of the word Snobbishness, "We can't define it, perhaps"; and it is unfair to quote one of his attempts, "mean

<sup>1</sup> See Dibelius (ii. 264) on the "Silver-fork school," and (266) on his satire of mean snobbishness.

<sup>2</sup> See above, 191, and for his view of Mrs Gore's novels, 222.

<sup>3</sup> See above, 173.

<sup>4</sup> See above, 166.

<sup>5</sup> As Cazamian points out, Dickens singles out characters from the superior classes, especially the "classes dirigeantes," "the bourgeoisie d'affaires," for his dislike, not so much for social, as for psychological reasons: "C'est un tempérament, non une classe que Dickens poursuit de son antipathie" (*Le Roman social en Angleterre*, 279).

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*Snobbish-ness according to Thackeray* admiration of mean things," as final or exact. He stated what he meant as bluntly as anywhere in his essay on Cruikshank—aping the quality. Bagehot put it correctly as "the habit of 'pretending to be higher in the social scale than you really are'"<sup>1</sup>; it is a particular kind of hypocrisy and imposture. In Thackeray's day it had appeared in an exaggerated and virulent form, and assumed the proportions of an epidemic. He was not strictly accurate in his prefatory remarks: "First, the World was made; then, as a matter of course, Snobs." The snobs of former eras were neither identical with those of Thackeray's nor so numerous. The alarming prevalence of snobbishness in the present age was due to recent disturbances in the once rigid class-system. The whole fabric had lost its stability and equilibrium, with the result that even the scale of values was in a state of change and uncertainty. It was one of the phenomena of the industrial revolution, which had brought all sorts of rich upstarts to the top, and set the others envying and emulating their superiors. The paradoxical situations and the freaks of conduct and demeanour which resulted met with the more ridicule through the "rage for comic stories," which Thackeray, in the same essay on Cruikshank, notes as characteristic of his day. This was a humorous age, and snobbishness in all its varieties fell an easy prey to the satirist.<sup>2</sup> The world had awakened to the baseness of subservience and flunkeyism, and also to an uncomfortable sense that hardly an individual could prove himself guiltless, or fail to see that in others' eyes he often looked ridiculous. Thackeray's error was to approach the subject, not as a simple humorist, but as a moralist and homilist: he treated snobbishness as a crime, not a mere absurdity; and this almost personal bitterness tends to distort his vision throughout his novels.

But the pith and vivacity of the character-drawing and the tale-telling in the *Book of Snobs*, in spite of the wholesale provocation, brought Thackeray decisively to the front as a

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Studies*, ii.—"Sterne and Thackeray."

<sup>2</sup> G. K. Chesterton says, "The true source of snobs in England was the refusal to take one side or the other heartily in the crisis of the French Revolution" (Introduction to *Thackeray* (*Masters of Literature*, xi.). This view is not quite irreconcilable with the one suggested above.

satirist and a potential novelist; and the *Novels by Eminent Hands*, which had been coming out in *Punch* as the "Prize by Novelists," now added both to his fame and his promise. These burlesques are his last word in the polemic against the inflated romanticism of Lytton, Disraeli, Lever, G. P. R. James, and the rest. He had previously offended Disraeli with a review of *Coningsby*<sup>1</sup>; and "Codlingsby" was an affront which Disraeli never forgave, taking a posthumous revenge in a silly caricature of Thackeray as St Barbe, in *Endymion*, more than thirty years later. Lever is said to have changed his style after "Phil Fogarty"; and relieved his exasperation by putting Thackeray into *Roland Cashel* as the foolish English tourist Elias Howle.<sup>2</sup> They became good friends again later.

Meanwhile, the first of Thackeray's novels on the grand scale had begun coming out in monthly parts in 1847, and now appeared completed, with the sub-title, "A Novel without a Hero," in place of "Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society." "Without a hero" should be a sufficient answer to those who object that so few personal attractions were allotted to the faithful Dobbin; and, though Thackeray did not add, "without a heroine," that too is almost as clearly implied. If there is a heroine, it cannot be the humdrum Amelia; it must be Becky Sharp.<sup>3</sup> *Vanity Fair* (1848) is at once a great anatomy of society, and the epic of a great adventuress. Becky Sharp is as manifestly the heroine as Satan is the hero of *Paradise Lost*. Not that Thackeray would have dared to call her the heroine, or even that he calmly and consciously envisaged her as such.<sup>4</sup> He could not have borne it, and it would have raised a shriek of indignation from readers who saw their own respectable virtues mirrored in the insipid Amelia and the estimable Dobbin. But hers is the character and hers are the fortunes, with Amelia in a

<sup>1</sup> Elwin, 123-124.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 53-54 and n.

<sup>3</sup> Thackeray says himself, "If this is a novel without a hero, at least let us lay claim to a heroine" (xxx.). This, of course ironically, & *propos* of Becky.

<sup>4</sup> Some American critics, however, are so impressed by the pre-eminence of Becky's rôle and her general brilliance, that they boldly assume that Thackeray meant *Vanity Fair* as a picaresque novel, with Becky as anti-heroine. Thus Cross: "*Vanity Fair* is of the picaresque novels, the prime characteristic of which has always been the holding up to view [of] the seamy side of life" (203). Chandler studies it side by side with *Barry Lyndon*, as one of the novels of roguery (462-466).

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secondary yet auxiliary rôle, which give artistic unity to what had been first conceived as "sketches of society." Becky, without an ally but her own wits, makes her way in the world, all but marries a baronet, and does become the wife of the baronet's son, the dashing, superb, devil-may-care guardsman, Rawdon Crawley, a masterpiece of realistic drawing. She runs a course of dazzling social successes, based on nothing but debts and effrontery, till the inevitable collapse, when she retires to shadier spheres on the Continent, ending, however, in the odour of respectability. Amelia, the good young thing of stories for schoolgirls, marries "that young whiskered prig, Lieutenant Osborne," who is unfaithful to her almost as soon as the honeymoon is over; and, when he is shot at Waterloo, swears to be true to him for evermore, though the far superior Dobbin courts and befriends her when she richly deserves to be left to her misfortunes.

Thackeray was not always clear-headed about his good characters, especially when they were women. It is therefore pleasing to note that he was under no illusions about Amelia, or for the matter of that about Becky Sharp. In a letter which came to light some years ago, he explained that his object in *Vanity Fair* was—

"to indicate, in cheerful terms, that we are for the most part an abominably foolish and selfish people 'desperately wicked' and all eager after vanities. Everybody is you see in that book, —for instance if I had made Amelia a higher order of woman there would have been no vanity in Dobbin's falling in love with her, whereas the impression at present is that he is a fool for his pains, that he has married a silly little thing and in fact has found out his error, rather a sweet and tender one however, *quia multum amavit*." <sup>1</sup>

So we can now regard Amelia as a foolish and not a very generous woman, without priding ourselves on being superior in insight and acumen to the author. Nor need we, in so doing, call either him or ourselves cynics.

*Becky  
Sharp*

Becky is a figure of such outstanding importance that the story drags at times after her downfall; and Amelia and

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, 17th July 1911.

Dobbin are relatively such minor characters that they might have been left to shift for themselves. But Thackeray was depicting a whole social world as a Vanity Fair; and, apart from that, the Dobbin-Amelia comedy brings out the inherent greatness of Becky. Wicked and unscrupulous as she is, Becky could be not only hard-headed but also large hearted. Twice she intervenes on behalf of Dobbin, whom she has no reason to love, and of Amelia, who little deserves her good services. The first was when she wrote him the note which he tore up on finding that it was not from Amelia, who had "done her duty," dismissed him, and turned again for consolation to her picture of George. Becky had overheard his prayers and protests, and Amelia's obstinacy.

Whilst they had been talking, the door into Mrs Osborne's room had opened ever so little; indeed, Becky had kept a hold of the handle, and had turned it on the instant when Dobbin quitted it, and she heard every word of the conversation that had passed between these two. "What a noble heart that man has," she thought, "and how shamefully that woman plays with it." She admired Dobbin; she bore him no rancour for the part he had taken against her. It was an open move in the game, and played fairly. "Ah!" she thought, "if *I* could have had such a husband as that—a man with a heart and brains too! I would not have minded his large feet"; and, running into her room, she absolutely bethought herself of something, and wrote him a note, beseeching him to stop for a few days—not to think of going—and that she could serve him with A.<sup>1</sup>

The other occasion was when she rescued Amelia from the evil attentions of the blacklegs, Loder and Rook. Becky has made up her mind that Amelia must marry "the bamboo-cane," and treats her to a candid lecture. "You must marry, or you and your precious boy will go to ruin. You must have a husband, you fool; and one of the best gentlemen I ever saw has offered you a hundred times, and you have rejected him, you silly, heartless, ungrateful little creature!" Becky plays her last card, and throws into Amelia's lap the billet put into her bouquet, years ago, on the night of the Duchess of Richmond's

ball. Amelia is stricken to the earth: "for almost the last time in which she shall be called upon to weep in this history. she commenced that work."

Who shall analyse those tears, and say whether they were sweet or bitter? Was she most grieved, because the idol of her life was humbled down and shivered at her feet, or indignant that her love had been so despised, or glad because the barrier was removed which modesty had placed between her and a new, a real affection? "There is nothing to forbid me now," she thought. "I may love him with all my heart now. Oh, I will, I will, if he will but let me, and forgive me."<sup>1</sup>

*The rest of the characters* But it is almost an impertinence to quote words so well known, or catalogue the foremost personages in a work familiar to all educated men and women. Suffice it, that they range from the almost savage fidelity with which the hard City merchant, the elder Osborne, and the "low-bred cockney dandy, that padded booby," his son, are drawn, to the Irish and perfectly natural extravagance of Mrs O'Dowd, and the imposing though deliberately one-sided portrait of the great Marquess of Steyne, with his myrmidons. Steyne, as everybody knows, had the same original as Disraeli's Monmouth, yet is a very different being. Thackeray took what he required for the cynical man of the world, the profligate and voluptuary who was also a great nobleman, one of the princes of Vanity Fair. From Croker he took what he wanted to make a Wenham, and from Theodore Hook enough for a Wagg. Most of the others are lifelike on their own merits: the conceited younger Pitt Crawley, who falls such an easy victim to Becky's flattery, the Rev. Bute Crawley and Mrs Bute, and that fine old epitome of worldliness and selfishness, sharp insight and cynical wit, Miss Crawley, as good as Lady Kew and the Baroness de Bernstein, in later novels. Among the least overcharged of his caricatures is fat Jos Sedley; and of those most effectively and legitimately satirized, that arrant specimen of mean snobbishness, the Countess of Bareacres. Misgivings have often been expressed regarding two characters, Major Dobbin and Sir Pitt Crawley. High worth, in the one case,

is discounted by such a lack of the graces; the other looks such an incredible grotesque. Thackeray is reported to have said that Sir Pitt was "almost the only exact portrait in the whole book," and it is known that he was drawn to some extent from the eccentric Baron Rolle of Stevenstone; Dobbin, who might often be taken for a butt, was a likeness of Thackeray's friend, John Allen. The one, at any rate, was a human curiosity; and the other had touches of it. Strange that direct copying from life seems somehow to throw the more normal realism out of gear! Such caricature as there is does not exceed legitimate heightening; it is scarcely more than a matter of emphasis. The quality in which *Vanity Fair* rises superior even to *Pendennis* or *The Newcomes* is the evenness of tone; the point of view is always the same. It is not a medley of tragic-comedy with occasional farce and burlesque. Up to the catastrophe, the unmasking of Becky and Lord Steyne by Rawdon Crawley, the structure is faultless. It is not plot, in the vulgar sense. The events chronicled are the common-places of *Vanity Fair*. No need for secrets, disclosures, or any of the conventional paraphernalia. It is the very image of life, consummately rendered; and the achievement was to have made the ordinary and familiar so profoundly and uniformly interesting.

In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray had undertaken to paint a social "Pen-world in its entirety. In *The History of Pendennis* (1849-1850), <sup>dennis</sup>" his particular object was different. As the sub-title intimates, it was to relate the history of a young man, "his fortunes and misfortunes, his friends and his greatest enemy," who was of course the young man himself. *Pendennis* must be judged by a very high standard. It was avowedly written in emulation of Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Further, the hero is, undisguisedly, a self-reflection of Thackeray: he actually reappears as the ostensible historian of *The Newcomes* and *Philip*. Thus Thackeray was under special obligations to tell the truth, and the whole truth. But in his preface he pleads that, though Fielding was able to "depict to his utmost power a man," frankness had now become impossible. "Society will not tolerate the Natural in our Art." He allows that the



of a heroine to make the reader fall in love with her, as Thackeray believed. Actually, his most real and telling figures are those who came out of his brain, not as the result of careful premeditation, but, as it were, involuntarily and unconsciously, those, in short, whom he said he did not control. The novel of manners and the novel of character are not quite the same thing. Fielding combined the two, and Thackeray tried, but was not good at showing character in process of development. His *Pendennis* is vitiated, as the portrait of a rational being with instincts and emotions, by his inability or unwillingness to get below the surface. His science was of man the social animal. He saw men in crowds, reacting together, and found it difficult to insulate the individual for an intensive study. Later novelists, such as George Eliot, Meredith, and Conrad, essayed the more difficult task; and their fiction, whatever its comparative demerits, is of an ampler reach. For them a character is not a mere collection of surface phenomena, but a thing with a mind; and not only do the workings of that mind make the surface phenomena more intelligible, they also enlarge the scope of character, by showing it conscious of all sorts of relations to the universe, and changing and developing in response thereto. Thackeray never plunges into the deeps of consciousness; and the result, in a full-length study such as *Pendennis*, is a blurring of the outlines. What does Pen's whole story amount to? A healthy young man of the right English stamp, modest and good-natured, capable of strong, unselfish passion, pure in his ideals, gradually adapts himself to the imperfections of his time and state, accepts its compromises and limitations, and subsides into the indifferent, tolerant, sceptical man of the world, "without faith and without enthusiasm, the contented servant of things as they are." Pen is obliged to admit that his life is a "contemptible surrender." And why? Does he make any effort to shape his own destiny? Not at all. Many characters in the book enjoy a more individual and independent being than Mr Arthur Pendennis. He is not much more than an interested yet somewhat indifferent spectator. Pen is a "writing gent," with exceptional opportunities for seeing the hollowness of

the world, in all the phases visible to a society journalist. For his own part, he hardly comes into contact with realities. He ends merely as a novelist of manners in a novel of manners. Thackeray promised to write the inner history of a man, and gives instead a graphic picture of the manners and morals, the humours and the absurdities, of a large segment of society, with an inadequate view of their reactions upon a susceptible young man—a masterpiece, indeed, but a very different kind of masterpiece from *Tom Jones*.

In *Pendennis* the ethical aspects are always uppermost. But the literary and artistic quality of a novel is far from depending entirely upon the writer's moral attitude. *Pendennis* is equal to any of Thackeray's novels as a vivid picture of mundane experience in all its fullness, not omitting what looks commonplace, but is intrinsically not more commonplace than that which gives the illusion of being more memorable. It is all but as long as *The Newcomes*, and like that it is a novel without a plot. This was the day of serial publication; and Dickens, as well as Thackeray, wrote their first chapters, and, as if they took Sterne's comic advice seriously and trusted to Providence for guidance, yielded the reins to that sense of reality in which they could firmly trust. But, if plotless, both novels have the coherence and unity of life, which is also plotless, and at the mercy of accident. From the opening, which puts the reader in easy possession of the leading characters and the state of affairs, to the "Exeunt omnes," in which, after many hazards and vicissitudes, those in whom sympathy centres depart with a modest good fortune though not without the trials and disappointments which chequer the lot of average humanity, there is not a lapse. It is pre-eminently a comedy of situation, which comedy must be; but the characters are as rich and various and as typical as well as individual as any whose interplay makes the comedy or tragedy of any novel whatsoever. That delightful "old heathen" and most engaging of snobs, Major Pendennis, is Thackeray's finest example of this favourite genus.<sup>1</sup> He belongs to the world

<sup>1</sup> Dibelius (ii. 304) finds his rough prototype in Marryat's Major Carbonell, in *Jabber*, a highly respectable picaro living on next to nothing. Carbonell is conscious

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of Lord Steyne, and so is a connecting link with *Vanity Fair*. The literary world and the world of Bohemia come into the panorama, with the retinue of the publisher Bungay, and with the Fotheringay and her father Captain Costigan, the Irishman whose truth to his race was afterwards vindicated, as Thackeray relates, when he accidentally ran against his veritable double.<sup>1</sup> With the Clavering household and its tottering fortunes, and the rascality of the runaway convict Colonel Altamont, there is some concession to melodrama; and Pen's rivalry with the enamoured *chef*, M. Mirobolant, and the absurd challenge which follows, are a plunge into the unalloyed farce, or bathos, for which Thackeray always had a weakness. Yet the Claverings bring with them such excellent company as the Chevalier Strong, an adventurer as full-flavoured as his name, that pleasing type of ill-breeding, the Begum, the knowing, light-headed, but sound-hearted little Foker,<sup>2</sup> and such a bundle of nerves and affectations as Blanche Amory, a very different sort of anti-heroine from Becky, in the previous novel. Of the two attempts at blackmail, the second, with the Major's discomfiture of his valet Morgan, makes one of the pithiest dramatic scenes Thackeray ever wrote, and exhibits Major Pendennis as a man of action; he had already shown his powers as a diplomatist in the affair of his nephew and Miss Costigan. The domestic scenes do not fall short.

Thackeray drew upon the memories of his boyhood, at Larkbeare, in Devon, not far from Exeter, in the picture of Fair Oaks; and Helen Pendennis was drawn from the mother, Mrs Carmichael-Smyth, whom he had left in India. Helen and Laura are admirable women, but they are drawn with such an overplus of sentiment that they do not placate a hard-

that his life has been a failure; and, though on his deathbed he expresses remorse and regret, he envies Japhet's young idealism, and loves him for it. The comparison is not very convincing.

<sup>1</sup> The incident is recounted in "De finibus" (*Roundabout Papers*).

<sup>2</sup> On the fuss about Thackeray's alleged caricaturing of Andrew Arcedeckne, for which it is supposed that he was rejected by the Travellers' Club, see Melville, i. 318-319. There was, anyhow, not much caricature in question. Cordy Jeaffreson said it was "a genial and flattering portrait." It is to be hoped that the injured Arcedeckne was as good a fellow as Foker.

headed reader. Warrington, too, the tender heart under the rough exterior, the hater of shams and conventions, the kindly cynic, is not such a source of perennial joy as he was meant to be. Though he mirrors the author's attitude and is a kind of official commentator, he must be pronounced a figment of the didactic imagination, and the tragedy which is supposed to have blighted his life is set forth with so much mystification that no one believes in it.<sup>1</sup>

*The History of Henry Esmond, Esq., a Colonel in the Service of "Es-her Majesty Queen Anne, written by himself* (1852), stands on a 'mond' separate pinnacle from the rest of Thackeray's novels; though not the greatest, it is the most perfect in shape and style, and it occupies the same position among historical novels by any authors whatsoever. It was most carefully prepared; in fact, it was the first of his novels which he planned in detail before commencing to write. He was almost as familiar with the period chosen as with his own lifetime, and till the eve of his death he nursed the idea of writing a history of the age of Anne. Recently he had been immersed in it afresh in preparing his *Lectures on the English Humorists*, which he published a year later in 1853. It came to him as second nature to write in a style which, without actual archaism, expressed the very mind and soul of the period. In short, the book is written with all the apparatus of a historical memoir by a contemporary, and with an art such as might have been expected of a man of letters who was a friend of Steele and Addison. Though he speaks for the most part in the third person, that man is the autobiographer; and Thackeray succeeded in the difficult task of making him a real, concrete character; Henry Esmond is, in truth, one of Thackeray's great creations. Thackeray triumphed over all these difficulties, and over another, so as not to offend against probability or against the most delicate feeling, which was, to show his hero in love with Beatrix, and then with the mother of Beatrix. So firm is his grasp of the characters that the revelation comes without the least shock, but, on the contrary, with the assurance that it is the right and natural

<sup>1</sup> Bungay and Bacon are believed to be drawn from Colburn and Bentley, and Shandon is a famous portrait of Maginn.

consummation of all that has preceded.<sup>1</sup> These three are the foremost and the most memorable among the many characters; but the others are drawn with his wonted incisiveness, including a number of those most famous in the annals of the time. That he showed a sort of personal animus towards Marlborough does not detract in the least from the brilliance of that portrait; the only historical personage who is, not simply mishandled, but absolutely caricatured, is Swift, whom Thackeray never could understand.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps no other of his books is so indisputably a classic. And one cannot think of *Esmond*, one can hardly think of Thackeray, but there rises before the mental eye one or other of those great scenes, so consummately pictorial as well as dramatic: Beatrix, the proudly beautiful maid of honour, descending the stairs to greet Esmond; the quarrel of Lord Castlewood and the detestable Mohun, followed by the fatal duel; the final interview with the Stuart prince, when Esmond checkmates the little game of him and Beatrix.

"*The  
Virgin-  
ians*"

After his lectures on *The Four Georges* and his two visits to America, Thackeray wrote a sequel to *Esmond*, in *The Virginians, a Tale of the Last Century* (1858-1859). It is the story of Esmond's two grandsons, the Esmond Warringtons; and the scribe is one of the Warrington family, a characteristic fiction, which connects it with Pendennis's friend, who certainly has a distant family likeness to Esmond. It is a very long and uneven book, divided in scene between the two countries, and its loose structure tending to fall into two divisions. The interest is not on the same level as that of *Esmond*; it is family memoirs, repeatedly coming into contact with history, but depending mainly for interest on the changes and contrasts of character and on scenes alive with domestic comedy. Naturally a good many historical persons come on the stage at times, General Wolfe, George Washington, Fielding, Dr Johnson, Richardson, for instance. That fine old bookworm, General

<sup>1</sup> It has been urged that Thackeray's affection for Mrs Brookfield had no small part in inspiring this. *Esmond* was written "during the period of their greatest intimacy," "he sought to idealize his attitude towards her in the attitude of his hero towards Lady Castlewood" (Elwin, 211).

<sup>2</sup> He was one of those who took literally Swift's proposal to establish a market for the sale of Irish children for food.

Lambert, and the charming Theo and Hetty Lambert, are pleasant creations; whilst a more biting pen is evident in the portraits of the debauched Lord Castlewood and the kind, rascally, boozing parson, Sampson. But the book must be read if only for the portrait of Beatrix in her last phase, as the aged Madame de Bernstein, Thackeray's finest presentment of a worldly woman, still keen of insight and penetrating humour, still "stately, easy, and even commanding," but scarcely pathetic in her cynical old age. That figure is, as it was meant to be, one of the most impressive sequels in literature.

*Esmond* was a deviation from Thackeray's main road. The "true sequel to *Pendennis* was *The Newcomes*, *Memoirs of a most respectable Family* (1854-1855), that great middle-class epic, the *Newcomes*, the *tragi-comedy of worldliness*. Here Thackeray is to be seen performing what he undertakes, and is incomparably able, to perform. The historian of society has found the precise area, and an immense area it is, in which his genius could realize itself most completely. Here he did not meet with the same difficulties as in *Pendennis*. It is possible to show the folly and depravity of a large section of society without pushing far into those recesses of the mind and soul which must be explored in explaining the tragedy of the individual. In the different branches of the Newcome family during two generations, Thackeray traced the impact of character upon character, the moral forces at work in a certain environment, the subtle changes of affection, the growth of hatred, and the steady modification of, not one or two, but a large group of characters immersed in this infinitely complex world. He was too zealous a preacher to be quite impartial. He laid the emphasis on human infirmity and human depravity. That side of the picture is overcharged, as was the grim panorama of *Vanity Fair*; and not so much for the sake of good-humoured satire or ironical comedy, as to do his duty in bringing out the lessons of vice. If Thackeray failed to tell the whole truth in relating the history of a typical man, if there were reservations even in the story of Becky Sharp, he told more than the truth when he exposed the follies of a whole period, uncloaked hypocrisies,

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revealed the half-deceived to themselves, and swept up all that was sordid and vicious in the world of his day.

*The  
sternness  
of his  
realism*

There is nothing in the whole range of Thackeray's work which is more painful reading, if the general perspective is lost sight of, than the chapters in which Clive's mother-in-law, the terrible Campaigner, is the dominating figure. The long drawn-out agony of the Colonel's degradation and Clive's misery under this awful infliction in the shape of a woman is a spectacle that almost reaches the limits of endurance. Thackeray will abate nothing. "I cannot help telling the truth," he says, "as I view it. To describe it otherwise than it seems to me would be falsehood to that calling in which it has pleased heaven to place me, treason to that conscience which says men are weak, that truth must be told, that fault must be owned, that pardon must be prayed for, and that love reigns supreme over all." Not for him now the irony with which he presented the detestable Deuceace, or the satire which had exposed and buffeted so many scoundrels and hypocrites. There is no compromise with truth in *The Newcomes*. Life there is immitigable, the world relentless. These are the upper and the nether millstones that grind out character, and character is the one thing that matters. Clive is crushed, and the Colonel broken; but the victory is with them. Clive is chastened, purified, and ripened by the ordeal which beats his character into shape. As for the Colonel, in the light of his serene ending, does he not make even adversity estimable? Nor is the Campaigner out of place in the higher comedy which does not and must not shrink from the tragic side of life; or call it tragi-comedy, since this prose representation of the whole spectacle by such a one as Thackeray must be always alive to both aspects. Such women exist. She is a true image of the utterly selfish woman, stolidly incapable of comprehending the point of honour or the natural generosity which actuates far inferior men to Colonel Newcome: she is a marvel of subtle and veracious drawing. Without any false poetic justice, her deserts are meted out to her in the lovelessness and hideousness which such a disposition inevitably makes of life.

But the Campaigner is a figure of less importance in the *The two* general scheme than Barnes and Ethel Newcome, a man and a <sup>chief</sup> woman drawn on the large scale with the author's truest pen. <sup>figures</sup> Barnes Newcome, the clever, mean, cowardly, successful banker, is the crowning example of this world of self-seekers. He is bodied forth with pitiless truth, and he remains perfectly human. The author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* wrote a history of vice and its consequences called *The Life and Death of Mr Badman*. It was written entirely for the sake of the moral; yet it is a work of pure art because Bunyan refrained from overloading his indictment: in truth, he did not accuse at all. He let the portrait speak for itself. He also abstained from visiting the sinner with any punishment but his own depravity and the extinction of all that was good in him. It is the story of the death of a soul. Thackeray was not quite so true to life as Bunyan. He does give Barnes a trouncing; and he outrages probability by making the hypocrite perform in a too-absurd display of hypocrisy. It is asking too much of poetic faith to pretend that Barnes, whose feelings might be impenetrable but whose intelligence was very wide awake, would be so ignorant of his reputation as a domestic tyrant and a recent figure in an odious divorce case as to stand before an audience in his own town and lecture on the poetry of the affections. In fact, Thackeray lets fall the remark elsewhere in the book that Barnes could not understand poetry, which may be well believed. Thackeray the moralist is once more too much for Thackeray the impartial realist, and cannot help exaggerating the man's cant and cynicism to make the lesson more pointed.

Ethel Newcome, this odious person's sister, is the only heroine of Thackeray's, or, to evade that conventional term, the only woman whose beauty of character outweighs her blemishes—that is, without any false touches. Some shade of sentimentalism spoils all the others—Beatrix Esmond would not count, even had she not declined into the Baroness de Bernstein. Ethel Newcome is the opposite of the soft-hearted but narrow-minded Amelia and her kind. Her faults make her purely human: her frankness in admitting them disarms. Her keen intelligence, charity, wit, self-possession,



and admirable self-esteem compel respect as well as regard. She is too dignified and clear-sighted to harbour the sentimentality which afflicts so many of Thackeray's women; but the depth and sincerity of her feeling, the integrity behind her apparent worldliness, set her apart from Thackeray's earlier loves. Like Miss Crawley and Becky Sharp, in *Vanity Fair*, like the misguided Beatrix, like several others of Thackeray's women not meant to be patterns of virtue, Ethel Newcome is a person with a mind; and to most of these she is a refreshing contrast. The central motive of the central situation, if there is a centre to so vast and complicated a novel, is set forth in her reply to Clive's urgency:

You spoke quite scornfully of palaces just now, Clive. I won't say a word about the—the regard which you express for me. I think you have it. Indeed, I do. But it were best not said, Clive; best for me, perhaps, not to own that I know it. In your speeches, my poor boy—and you will please not to make any more or I never can see you or speak to you again, never—you forgot one part of a girl's duty: obedience to her parents. They would never agree to my marrying any one below—any one whose union would not be advantageous in a worldly point of view. I never would give such pain to the poor father, or to the kind soul who never said a harsh word to me since I was born. My grandmamma is kind, too, in her way. I came to her of my own free will. When she said she would leave me her fortune, do you think it was for myself alone that I was glad? My father's passion is to make an estate, and all my brothers and sisters will be but slenderly portioned. Lady Kew said she would help them if I came to her—and—it is the welfare of those little people that depends upon me, Clive. Now do you see, *brother*, why you must speak to me so no more? There is the carriage. God bless you, dear Clive.

Ethel does not make a brilliant match after all. It is left to be inferred, indeed, in the two pages of epilogue, that, after Clive had lost his doll-like Rosie, Ethel does become his wife—and it is to be hoped that he proved worthy of his luck.

*The  
other  
characters*

The book teems with characters who are for the most part impeccably true to their time and station. Probably the one inseparably bound up with most people's recollections of it

is Clive's father, Colonel Newcome. His favourite heroes in boyhood were Sir Charles Grandison, Sir Roger de Coverley, and Don Quixote. He is, or his portrait was, formed on those models, and to a critical age is a little too like them. The modern mind has outgrown belief in paragons of virtue, and, it must be admitted, they fit with difficulty into works of realism. The ugly but true has a beauty there denied to impossible goodness; and, as a work of honest art, the hideous Campaigner gives more æsthetic satisfaction than the gracious figure of the Colonel. She is a piece of pure naturalism. So, in a soberer way, are Brian and Hobson Newcome and their families, touched in with some excellent comedy, particularly in the case of Lady Ann Newcome's irreproachable sister-in-law Maria, and some other specimens of the ridiculous ordinary person:

Maria was charmed to see her brother-in-law; she greeted him with reproachful tenderness. "Why, why," her fine eyes seemed to say, "have you so long neglected us? Do you think because I am wise, and gifted, and good, and you are, it must be confessed, a poor creature with no education, I am not also affable? Come, let the prodigal be welcomed by his virtuous relatives: come and lunch with us, Colonel!"

Several pairs of characters are noticeable, like these two groups and the rival painters, Smee and Gandish. But Thackeray wisely avoided Fielding's symmetrical contrasts, such as the parallelogram of Square and Thwackum, Jones and Blifil, which tend to leave the impression of bundles of moral and immoral attributes placed over against each other in the intellectual scheme. The foreigners are brilliantly done. The Vicomte de Florac, unabashed whether needy or affluent, is an exquisite comedy figure; Madame de Florac, Colonel Newcome's old flame, is exquisite in another way; and that farcical Englishwoman, the Princesse de Moncontour, *née* Higg, is happily contrived to be their foil. Another personage verging on caricature is the Rev. Charles Honeyman. Who has not met his like? The accomplished incumbent of Lady Whittlesea's chapel, so bland, so sensitive, so tender, with such a manner in the pulpit, and such a gift for extracting

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large offerings from the faithful, is overdone, admittedly<sup>1</sup>; and so is the jovial Fred Bayham, the journalist inexhaustible in eulogy of his friends and crushing invective for their enemies. But a little farce does not hurt, so long as it is not allowed to interfere with the serious business of high comedy. And in *The Newcomes* Thackeray did keep this under better control than was his wont, and rarely confused the perspective by mixing broad comedy with grave analysis of realities. Lastly, another of his great worldly women must not be overlooked, Lady Kew: that formidable dowager is a book in herself.

"Philip" *The Adventures of Philip on his Way through the World, showing who Robbed him, who Helped him, and who Passed him by* (1862), which appeared first in the *Cornhill Magazine* which Thackeray was editing, ought surely to be grouped with the other three great novels of English society. Admittedly, it should be placed last; but if it had been the first to appear, it would be regarded now as Thackeray's diploma piece; or, if someone else had written it, that rival would have been hailed as threatening Thackeray's supremacy. As already mentioned, he built upon *A Shabby Genteel Story*, which he had left a hastily finished fragment on his wife's illness. The guilty old seducer, his clerical accomplice, now a sponging harpy, and the son who in time guesses the truth and is alienated from his father, are the three antagonistic figures of the later drama; the great-hearted victim, Caroline, the Little Sister of this later day, makes a fourth. Here are all the materials for tragedy or tragi-comedy; but the story expands into a regular novel of personal relations, like the other three. At its best, and there is no lack of that best, it does not fall short of the best in those three. Philip has more mettle in him than any two of the nominal heroes who preceded him. Where this novel falls short is chiefly in the

<sup>1</sup> According to Elwin (298), Honeyman was meant for Mr Brookfield: "A feeling of resentment towards the jealous husband's attitude caused him to launch a jibe against his friend, who was now a fashionable preacher at Berkeley Chapel, in the satirical picture of Charles Honeyman as the rhetorical prophet of Lady Whittlesea's Chapel." Honeyman is usually identified with the Rev. J. C. Montesquieu Bellew, a well-known writer (*vide* Higgins), who after ministering in various London churches went over to Rome.

amount of sermonizing, and reiterative sermonizing, with which Thackeray thought fit to improve upon many situations and little turns of the story which would have been telling enough without it. In one place, he speaks of himself as "this humble homilist"; the habit had grown upon him, and in this instance he overburdened the novel with what would have gone better into other pages of the magazine under the head of a *Roundabout Paper*.

But in *Philip* will be found some of Thackeray's finest *Some* characterization and a number of his strongest scenes. The *powerful* tenth chapter, in which Philip divines the secret history which *scenes* is the link between his father and Caroline, is tremendous. A half-repressed ejaculation tells the remorseful Dr Firmin what his son is thinking of:

"You don't disguise your likes or dislikes, Philip," says, or rather groans, the safe man, the sound man, the prosperous man, the lucky man, the miserable man. For years and years he has known that his boy's heart has revolted from him, and detected him, and gone from him; and with shame and remorse and sickening feeling, he lies awake in the night-watches, and thinks how he is alone—alone in the world. Ah! love your parents, young ones! O Father Beneficent! strengthen our hearts: strengthen and purify them so that we may not have to blush before our children!

There is the stuff of tragedy, and there is a sample of the superabundant preaching. It is as edifying and much more amusing to turn over a few pages to the ironical picture of the modern marriage market, or listen to Mrs Twysden preaching in pharisaical tones on the alleged wrong which has done her branch of the family out of Philip's inheritance.

"The mind"—Mrs Talbot Twysden's fine mind—"shuddered at the thought of such wickedness. . . . Philip Firmin was his *father's accomplice* . . . he knew of his *own illegitimacy*, which he was determined to set aside by any *fraud or artifice*. . . . And so little store did Philip set by *his mother's honour*, that he actually visited the abandoned woman, who acquiesced in her own infamy, and had brought such untold disgrace on the Ringwood family! . . . With people so

unscrupulous, so grasping, so artful as Dr Firmin and (must she say?) his son, they were bound to be *on their guard*; and though they had *avoided* Philip, she had deemed it right, on the rare occasions when she and the young man whom she must now call her *illegitimate* nephew met, to behave as though she knew nothing of this most dreadful controversy."

The subsequent incident of Philip's loss of his little fortune no doubt owes some of its pungency to Thackeray's similar experience. Mr Sansculotte Phil, "personally one of the most aristocratic and overbearing of young gentlemen," might even have been a hasty caricature of his author by one of the many people whom he unintentionally offended. He "had a contempt and hatred for mean people, for base people, for servile people, and especially for too familiar people, which was not a little amusing sometimes, which was provoking often, but which he was never at the least pained by disguising." But he loved those who had no airs or pretences; Madame Smolensk, the motherly but dignified head of the Paris *pension*, was his best friend, and that not simply because she conveys his love-letters to poor little Charlotte Baynes, kept there in durance by her terrible mother, a match even for the Campaigner.

Mr Philip treated her as an equal: which mark of affability he was not in the habit of bestowing on all persons. Some great people, some rich people, some would-be-fine people, he would patronize with an insufferable audacity. Rank or wealth do not seem somehow to influence this man, as they do common mortals. He would tap a bishop on the waistcoat, and contradict a duke at their first meeting. I have seen him walk out of church during a stupid sermon, with an audible remark perhaps to that effect, and as if it were a matter of course that he should go. If the company bored him at dinner, he would go to sleep in the most unaffected manner. At home, we were always kept in a pleasant state of anxiety, not only by what he did and said, but by the idea of what he might do or say next. He did not go to sleep at madame's boarding-house, preferring to keep his eyes open to look at pretty Charlotte's.

That boarding-house is the scene of what can only be described as the most magnificent row in all fiction, when General Baynes and his redoubtable wife, and their brother and sister-in-law, Major MacWhirter and the Majoress, discuss the situation, with many jorums of brandy-and-water and almost as many challenges to single combat. Chapter xxvii, "I charge you, drop your daggers!" is superb comedy. But the row is not finished in one chapter or in two.

Thackeray never drew a soul more touching and at the same time with more humour than the Little Sister, who worships Philip, would not dream of reasserting her rights over Philip's father, and puzzles the old lawyer by rejecting a very advantageous offer.

"She won't own to the marriage! She is fond of someone else—the little suicide!" thinks the old lawyer, as he clatters down the street to a neighbouring house, where his anxious principal was waiting. "She's fond of someone else!"

Yes. But the someone else whom Caroline loved was Brand Firmin's son: and it was to save Philip from ruin that the poor Little Sister chose to forget her marriage to his father.

"Except her *b's*," says afterwards that generous man of medicine, Dr Goodenough, "that woman has every virtue: constancy, gentleness, generosity, cheerfulness, and the courage of a lioness! To think of that fool, that dandified idiot, that triple ass, Firmin . . . of his having possessed such a treasure and flung it away!"

One of her most heroic yet humble and unpretending deeds for the sake of her idol is the hocussing of the unholy clerk in Holy orders, Mr Firmin Hunt, and the abstraction and burning of the promissory note. That is far from being the end of Philip's embarrassments, which are relieved at the end by the epiphany of a lost will. It is easier to forgive the Little Sister's splendid mendacity on behalf of Philip and the diddling of Mr Hunt, than this superannuated device on the part of Mr Thackeray.

One other novel, a short one, and the beginnings of a third were also among Thackeray's contributions to *Cornhill*. *Lovel the Widower* (1861) would be described as plotless—that is, there

"Lovel"  
and  
"Denis  
Duval"

is no great cast-iron affair which has to be formally disposed of, with a world of trouble, before he could arrive at a symmetrical ending. What plot there is emerges at the conclusion. The story seems to zigzag about, if it can be called a story: a lot of people each in love with the wrong person, and loved by those they do not care for, even the servants being in the same predicament. But there is a story, only it is the story that is life itself, unplotted and accidental, with no formal beginning or end.<sup>1</sup> As to that noble fragment, *Denis Duval*, which breaks off with a pealing sentence that must surely be the most magnificent last word of any novelist: "Then came a broadside from us—the first I had ever heard in battle"; what place might it not have taken in the catalogue of Thackeray's fiction! It was to have been the nearest in manner to feigned history of all his historical novels: an admirable simulation of authentic narrative by a contemporary. He prepared himself beforehand by industrious researches, the results of which survive in his notes. It is most interesting to notice how he substantiates the narrative as he goes by a hundred little seemingly accidental vouchers, a note jotted down, some official report that is extant, or the trace of some person in question at some hotel: "I know the day full well from a document now before me, of which the dismal writing and signing were occasioned by that very landing." And over all weighs that sense of ineluctable doom which goes fittingly with such a recital of once fateful events.

His  
method  
and  
manner

This is Thackeray's nearest approach to the epical strain. His greater novels approximate to the epic in other ways, in the amplitude of their outlook on life, an everlasting alternation of comic and tragic. Opposite characters are pitted against each other in every novel: Amelia and Becky, Lord Steyne and Dobbin, Laura Bell and Blanche Amory, Warrington and Major Pendennis, Lady Castlewood and Beatrix, Philip and Dr Firmin.<sup>2</sup> The manifestations of opposite traits and

<sup>1</sup> It was based on his play, *The Wolves and the Lamb*, which is extant in the *Works*; but the hero was resuscitated, under a new name, from "The Kickleburys on the Rhine."

<sup>2</sup> Las Vergnas is good on this point (304-305). As Brownell shrewdly points out, there are no neutrals: "The colourless characters, such as Tom Tulliver for a single

motives alternate in an almost regular rhythm. Life is a battle, though so many are not fighting, for they were beaten long ago and have laid down their weapons. "Countless knights were slain before St George won the battle. In the battle of life are we all going to try for the honours of championship? If we can do our duty, if we can keep our place pretty honourably through the combat, let us say, *Laus Deo!* at the end of it, as the firing ceases, and the night falls over the field."<sup>1</sup> "And have we not just read of the actions of the Queen's galleys and their brave crews in the Chinese waters? Men not more worthy of human renown and honour to-day in their victory, than last year in their glorious disaster. So with stout hearts may we ply the oar, messmates all, till the voyage is over, and the Harbour of Rest is found."<sup>2</sup> The centre of the battle may be in the family itself, where there are jealousies and dissensions and the everlasting friction of incompatible temperaments. And it rages in the world outside, between the honest and the dishonest, those with ideals and those without, the moral and the vicious, the sensual, the depraved, the decent people and the rogues. Selfishness and hypocrisy are the foe. Thackeray was misled in his social criticism by his obsession with snobs; this was but a side-issue, and some of his most upright and generous characters are not immune. Otherwise, he is serious and clear-headed. The complaint that he was afraid of depicting passion only means that he treated it in a gentlemanly, or, it would perhaps be better to say, in a bashful way. Talking about namby-pamby love conversations, he admits,

"I feel ashamed of myself, and especially when the business obliges me to do the love-passages, I blush so, though quite alone in my study, that you would fancy I was going off in an apoplexy."

He would like "a smart professional hand" to be available

example, in which George Eliot is so strong, the irresponsible ones, such as Dickens's Jingles and Swivellers, have few fellows in his fiction, from which the seriousness of his satiric strain excludes whatever is not significant as well as whatever is purely particular" (*Victorian Prose Masters*, "Thackeray," 28).

<sup>1</sup> *Roundabout Papers*—"De Juventute."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, "On a Joke I heard from the late T. Hood."



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for that sort of job, or to be able to order John Footman to take it in hand, "as I desire him to bring the coals and polish the boots." <sup>1</sup>

*His sensibility* The fact of the matter is, he was much more sensitive and tender-hearted than Dickens; though so many, misled by the mocking smile with which he keeps all that under, are tempted to ask, as Mr Batchelor asks concerning Miss Prior, "In that white breast is there a white marble stone in place of the ordinary cordial apparatus? Under the white velvet glove of that cool hand are there bones of cold steel?" <sup>2</sup>

He had to keep it under somehow. He goes on in the passage previously quoted: "Are authors affected by their own works? I don't know about other gentlemen, but if I make a joke myself I cry; if I write a pathetic scene I am laughing wildly all the time—at least Tomkins thinks so. You know I am such a cynic!" <sup>3</sup> Dozens of passages could be quoted from almost any book of his mentioned at random which would give the lie to the charge of cynicism or hard-heartedness. Take, however, only one, *Sketches and Travels in London* (1856), a collection of miscellaneous papers, rather like *Sketches by Boz*, the one considerable item among which was "Mr Brown's Letters to his Nephew." Most of it appeared first in *Punch*. Thackeray is accused of paying very little attention to the poorer classes. Well, he was not brought up in that state of life; but he did not ignore their existence, or when he went among them show himself any less compassionate than Dickens or any other charitable person. "The Curate's Walk" relates how he went visiting, with his philanthropic friend, and how they came across three children playing in a clean but poverty-stricken court, the little girls belonging to a poor charwoman. The writer gives the eldest a sixpence.

"What will you do with it?" I said, laying down the coin.

They answered, all three at once, and in a little chorus, "We'll give it to mother." This verdict caused the disbursement of another sixpence, and it was explained to them that

<sup>1</sup> *Roundabout Papers*—"On a Peal of Bells."

<sup>2</sup> *Love's the Widower*, v.

<sup>3</sup> *Roundabout Papers*—"On a Peal of Bells."

the sum was for their own private pleasures, and each was called upon to declare what she would purchase.

Elizabeth says, "I would like twopenn'orth of meat, if you please, sir."

'Melia: "Ha'porth of treacle, three-farthings'-worth of milk, and the same of fresh bread."

Victoria, speaking very quick, and gasping in an agitated manner: "Ha'pny—aha—orange, and ha'pny—aha—apple, and ha'pny—aha—treacle, and—and—" here her imagination failed her. She did not know what to do with the rest of the money.

At this, 'Melia actually interposed, "Suppose she and Victoria subscribed a farthing apiece out of their money, so that Betsy might have a quarter of a pound of meat?" She added that her sister wanted it, and that it would do her good. Upon my word, she made the proposal and the calculations in an instant, and all of her own accord. And before we left them, Betsy had put on the queerest little black shawl and bonnet, and had a mug and basket ready to receive the purchases in question.

True, this and many similar incidents are obviously the observations of a man to whom all of it is strange. But that is another matter, and irrelevant. The next paper, placed next certainly not by accident, "A Dinner in the City," contrasts the sumptuous, spendthrift splendour of the Bellows-Menders' dinner in the City with the curate's starving parishioners; and "A Night's Pleasure," just before "Going to see a Man Hanged," describes his own profound wretchedness as he listens to the professional imbecilities of a poor devil of a comic songster, in a tavern, perhaps a decent and sensible person, but obliged to "debase himself," to make the company laugh, for bread:

O Grinsby, thinks I, what a number of people and things in this world do you represent! Though we weary listening to you, we may moralize over you; though you sing a foolish, witless song, there is some good in it that may be had for the seeking. Perhaps that lad has a family at home dependent on his grinning: I may entertain a reasonable hope that he has despair in his heart; a complete notion of the folly of the

business in which he is engaged; a contempt for the fools laughing and guffawing round about at his miserable jokes; and a perfect weariness of mind at their original dullness and continual repetition. What a sinking of spirit must come over that young man, quiet in his chamber or family, orderly and sensible like other mortals, when the thought of tom-fool hour comes across him, and that at a certain hour that night, whatever may be his health, or distaste, or mood of mind or body, there he must be, at a table at the "Cave of Harmony," uttering insane ballads, with an idiotic grin on his face and hat on his head.

Perhaps those who object to his moralizing have overlooked these observations, and have noticed only the caustic sketching. If so be, they are very unlike Thackeray, who was acutely conscious of the work of the Good Samaritans, whether clergymen, like the priests of different sects in "Our Street," mere amateurs, like himself, or members of the medical profession, whom he treats with infinitely greater respect than his great master Fielding was inclined to:

They brought the doctor to her, who is never so eager as when he runs up a poor man's stair.

The doctor in this case is Goodenough, the Little Sister's friend, in *Philip*, a man Fielding, or perhaps Fielding's age, could never have conceived.

*Thackeray's  
reflective  
method*

Mention of Fielding leads the mind inevitably to the question of Thackeray's method, as another example of what has been called intellectual realism. Thackeray himself challenged comparison with Fielding. In his consummate handling of the technical possibilities of the novel he improved in some respects even on his master. Both regarded the novel, not merely as a representation, but also as an interpretation of life. Both had a practical philosophy which they expounded through this medium. Fielding expounded his in a somewhat different manner; but it is begging the question to contend, not merely that this was superior to Thackeray's, but, further, that it was the only legitimate manner. It has already been suggested that a novelist has a right to choose his own technical methods, though it is not denied for a moment that the efficiency and

cogency of his methods are open to condemnation or approval. "The novel is not its own excuse for being," says an acute American critic; "it is a picture of life, but a picture that not only portrays but shows the significance of its subject. Its form is particularly, uniquely elastic, and it possesses epic advantages which it would fruitlessly forgo in conforming to purely dramatic canons." "The question is, after all, mainly one of technic. When Thackeray is reproached with 'bad art' for intruding upon his scene, the reproach is chiefly the recommendation of a different technic. And each man's technic is his own, and that of a master may be accepted as possessing some inner principle of propriety which any suggested improvement would compromise."<sup>1</sup> In principle, Thackeray's method was right and unimpeachable: it is in full accord with the view of the novel accepted throughout this work, as radically different from the strictly concrete and autonomous arts, such as painting, sculpture, and the drama. The medium being prose, the medium of the intelligence, the intellectual treatment of the subject-matter is the appropriate one; only by violence or some sort of stratagem can this be avoided. Or, to put it differently, prose is chosen because it is an intellectual view of life that is to be conveyed, and not merely because prose is the medium of the ordinary business of life which is the matter in hand.

Objection merely to the intrusion—a word that begs the *Thackeray* question—of a moral philosophy cannot be tolerated; though the philosophy itself and the manner in which it is introduced *the homilist* are fairly open to criticism. As to the manner, Thackeray often offends, by reiteration and by comments that are cumbrous or inopportune. But the valid objection is to the triteness of much of his commentary. The sermon is dull. The philosophy expounded was not deep and searching; it was merely the sentiments of any right-thinking and clear-eyed person, not taken in by the common pretences of life. He was without that hard intelligence, free from the aberrations

<sup>1</sup> W. C. Brownell, *Victorian Prose Masters*—"Thackeray," 5-7. Brownell goes on: "Nothing could establish the edifice of his imaginative fiction on so sound a basis as those confidences with the reader—subtly inspired by his governing passion for truth—in which he is constantly protesting that it is fiction after all" (9).

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of feeling, which pursues its scrutiny with unfailing logic and fearless truth. Both he and Fielding thought it their bounden duty to anatomize life and show the ethical significance of what they related. But Thackeray, with his vague trust in goodness and rooted belief in the badness of most existing things, preaches where Fielding would have exposed and by implication criticized, and sheds tears and upbraidings when Fielding would have left the inner meaning to have been read in the light of his refined irony; Thackeray works himself up at last into such a panic that he overcolours a one-sided picture as a warning of our desperate condition. His observations are always amiable and wholesome, but not strikingly novel; and he kept on repeating them. One can stand seeing them continually illustrated in daily life; life is always repeating itself, life keeps on saying the same thing. But one does not want it pointed out over and over again, as if it were a long-awaited revelation. Flogging a dead horse is so much more cruel than flogging a live one, because so many individuals suffer: Thackeray is much too fond of that amusement. Life may seem banal and commonplace, until the veil is lifted. The grievance against Thackeray is that he does not lift the veil high enough.

*The  
comment  
enhances  
the  
realism*

It is undoubtedly true that his reflections on the characters and their doings tend to objectify them, to make them more intensely actual.<sup>1</sup> The running commentary, the talk between author and reader about people who are under the eyes of both, makes them so real that it is no surprise, quite the contrary, when one of them rings at the street door and walks in from another novel. The only question is, whether any such device is not superfluous. No one has ever excelled Thackeray in lifelike drawing. The question of probability

<sup>1</sup> Listen to Brownell again: "It [the personal comment] serves, on the contrary, to detach them from the background, to detach them from their creator himself. It is absolutely true that Thackeray's 'subjectivity' in this way subtly increases the objectivity of his creations. They are in this way definitely 'exteriorized.'" "This familiar commentary not only attests but greatly enhances the sense of reality, of life, in the characters that furnish its text" (Brownell, 10 and 13). Baucke (*passim*) is still more emphatic. Taine, on the contrary, condemns all this as "perdu pour l'art" (*op. cit.*, v. 119). Only in the case of *Esmond* will he have it that the comment does not interfere. He is unquestionably sound, at any rate, in thinking that Thackeray's attitude was too narrowly ethical, and not psychological enough (143).

never arises, as to the incidents and what the characters do; although, as to the characters themselves it may often be asked whether they all have their being on the same plane. And the omniscient reader, who is not to be hoodwinked, cannot help asking such questions as, how could Clive ever have married Rosie without seeing through her intolerable mother? His characters were real to Thackeray. He did not know beforehand what they would do or say in any emergency: they came and did it, and he simply kept the chronicle. "How the deuce did he come to think of that?" he exclaims of one. "I don't control my characters," he said, "I am in their hands, and they take me where they please." In this confident reliance upon the unconscious working of the mind, Thackeray's genius was like that of Scott and Dickens. At his finest, he was possessed by his characters, and he was right not to attempt to control them. But, unfortunately, he could not keep himself from interfering at times. He does now and then control Pendennis. He does not quite let Becky have her fling. His stories tell themselves perfectly and inimitably for a while, until Thackeray, always for our good and to keep us uncontaminated with evil, begins to manipulate. When he stepped through the screen and shook hands with the people on his imaginary stage he ought to have been satisfied to congratulate them, and not have resumed his duties of stage-manager after seeing how faultlessly they were performing.



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